This is Kashmir

by

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For

MARJORIE

THAT SHE TOO MAY KNOW KASHMIR

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Preface

THIS is the story of a country and a people; a country about the size of England and Scotland or the State of Minnesota, yet within whose frontiers may be found near-tropical heat and arctic snows, hot springs and glaciers. It is a land on which God had showered his blessings in the making, where the earth is good and can be made to grow much food, yet many of its people are near starvation; a land where the finest silks and the softest wools are spun and woven into cloth, yet most of its people are clad in rags; a land where precious stones are to be found, yet few of its people possess any; a land in which "the men are strong and the women as fruitful as the soil," being those of many basic cultures and creeds. A land which writers have described as "the Happy Valley", yet only those who visit it are happy, not those who dwell therein.

Never shall I forget my first sight from the air of the Vale of Kashmir. We were flying at about eighteen thousand feet; for half an hour we had seen only the rugged unfriendly mountains, here and there the rock slopes covered by fir trees, the tops with snow, when suddenly it was as though the mountains before us had been flattened by a giant hand. I was still gasping at the picture laid out below me, when through the roar of the engines I heard the voice of my navigator. "If there be a Paradise on earth, this is it, this is it, this is it. An emerald set in pearls."

Amazed at his poetic description, since he was not given to such phraseology, I turned quickly, and with an embarrassed laugh he explained, "Not my observation old boy. It happens to be what one of their Moghul Emperors said of it some hundreds of years ago. He must have had wings to have seen it like this."

No better words could describe that first view. The Vale is just like some huge flawed emerald—flawed by the rivers and the lakes, and surrounded by close-set pearls—the snow-

capped mountains are as though clasping it tight. As we cruised round for a while other colours appeared to frame first the emerald, the sapphire and amethyst shadings of the mountain slopes.

Being forbidden to make a landing on the grass air strip, we flew away from the valley, and it was some years before I could return again to get closer to its beauties and gain an intimate knowledge of the people who live within it.

Then it was that I discovered it was truly a land of colour—the colour of nature in the valleys, the mountains, the lakes, with the sky contributing an overflow of shades. There the colours in the rainbow were swamped, only to be appreciated in the white of the mountain snows, though even there as one looked down into the valleys, all was colour again, blending together as only Mother Nature can paint them, changing with the seasons and the passing hours of sunrise, sunset and moonlight. Never have I seen such colour, and unless my eyes were to gaze upon them, never can I believe that they exist in any other place. Truly this is the artist's paradise.

The story here told has but one bias, a sympathy for the people, a sincere endeavour to understand them, an appreciation of what they have had to contend with and suffer, and what they still suffer. Yet with all that sympathy there is no blindness to their many failings and weaknesses, either of the past or in the present.

Searching into that past, from the sculptures and writings of those who once lived there, we find a civilisation and culture existing in the days before the time when King Alfred was busy burning cakes in Britain; a civilisation of their ancestors of which the people of the country are mostly unaware.

Of the State of Jammu and Kashmir much has been heard in recent years. Its very existence has kept the relations of two newly created neighbouring countries strained almost to breaking point, with each of them spending millions of rupees in holding armies in readiness should the other attack; neither trading freely across their common frontier, and ever suspicious of the other's every move. Within the State itself there has been near-starvation at times among it people whose physical strength and morale are slowly ebbing.

So this is Kashmir. It is a picture of the land over which men have fought, and of a people who "by their free plebiscite shall decide their own future". It is a picture painted after many visits and much research so that those of the outside world may, before passing their own judgment on this "paradise on earth", know something of its past and present, of the people who dwell within its frontiers and love their country for what it once was and what it can become.

PEARCE GERVIS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to Srinagar

"SHRI NAGAR, meaning the city of beauty and wealth of knowledge, was for hundreds of years known as Pravarapura, being named after its founder King Pravarasena II who ruled in the sixth century. He it was who is said to have flown away to Kailas in Tibeth through a crack in the ceiling of the Pravarasa Temple, now lying in ruins between the Jama Masjid Mosque and the Hari Parbat Fort. In it he was wont to worship in that city he had founded, his faithful subjects who believed in the divinity of Kings, afterwards seeing him shining in the heavens like a star. The city became one of Asia's chief seats of learning, the one to which her students came in order to study Sanskrit."

This I find in one of the many books I have searched, but I am unable to acknowledge to its author since it is coverless, the title pages are missing and the others worm-eaten, dry and brown with age, just as though the book had been baked in an oven. It does tell us though that in those far off days the men who journeyed to Kashmir first made for Srinagar, they for learning, we now for pleasure, for Kashmir has been well named "The Playground of Asia".

The second time that I flew to Srinagar was when I went from Delhi on holiday by a commercial passenger 'plane. We had been warned before leaving that if "the Pass" was clouded over, we should have to spend the night in Jammu, for at such times flying over it is dangerous. But the sky remained clear and not long after leaving Jammu the mountains appeared ahead, then below us, shaded either purple where rocks covered the southern slopes, or, as we passed over them, green with fir trees on the sides facing the north.

I was travelling with my host-to-be, a retired Indian Army colonel who, with the intention of spending the rest of his days in the Valley of Kashmir, had bought a houseboat and for many years had lived there on the river, going down to his son's bungalow in Dehra Dun during the winter. Now with India "gone," as he described its independence with a sigh, he was returning for his last holiday there, and during that time hoped to dispose of the boat—that is if he happened to be fortunate enough to find a buyer, but from what he had heard there was only a buyers' market in houseboats.

He bent forward and guessing that I was perplexed, explained that the southern slopes get dried up early in the summer months, so dry that no vegetation can survive there, whilst the snows remain longer on those facing the north, the roots of the little trees get a hold, and then having thrown out their foliage, they in turn shelter the ground beneath and help it to retain the moisture.

We gazed down on the road running over the pass, a thin, brown thread twisting and turning in dozens of hairpin bends up to the height of well over nine thousand feet. At the top the road plunges through a six hundred and fifty feet long tunnel of solid rock. If only that tunnel had been made lower in the mountain—which would of course have meant it being longer—then the road might have remained open for many more weeks during the time when the Valley of Kashmir is now cut off from India by the snows which block it for many winter months.

Immediately we were over it, the pilot started losing height, and it was not long before we could pick out people walking and cattle moving about and grazing. The winding rivers were glistening in the sunshine like the tinsel decorations on a Christmas tree, here and there was the splash of a rosette—the ponds or tanks. Nearby were dark clumps of trees, among them the square brown roof-tops of farm houses, whilst it seemed as though the lines of poplars shot up everywhere to the skies, edging the fields and roads.

The great river Jhelum showed itself ahead, and seeing it the old fellow next to me was delighted. Looking out of the window he talked on, telling me that the river had always been the route

for processions. The second capital of Kashmir is Jammu which we had just left on the Indian side of the Pir Panjal range of mountains; to that city the Maharaja and his Government moved each autumn before the valley became snowbound; then with the spring—in April of each year—upon his return to his summer capital he made a state entry by barge.

The Colonel had seen this many times. On such occasions the river was dressed in her best, hardly a window or a boat not being decorated. Instead of bunting, paper garlands and flags, over window-sills and boats, precious Kashmir shawls, lovely wool mats and costly carpets were hung out. The roof-tops then green with the grass planted over them, were shaded with the mauve of iris, whilst those of the wealthier merchants were scarlet with tulips. The thousands of people who clustered to the water-front, filled the windows and crowded the stone steps and bridges, wore their gayest clothes, the Hindu women as always in their nun-like gowns of maroon, bottle-green or blue adding to the colour, a few of the Muslim women covered entirely in white or black burqas and peeping through the crochet-covered eye pieces, being lost behind the many children clinging to their skirts and the one they always seemed to hold up in their arms; the boys wearing bright coloured pill-box hats decorated with gold or silver thread patterns, the girls in multicoloured salwar kamiz.

Across the river large banners were stretched with messages of welcome and expressions of loyalty, these also hanging out in front of many of the houses and most of the shops.

As they came up the river the Maharaja's flotilla was always met outside the city by that of the Resident and his staff together with all the State officials. Both the Maharaja's and the Resident's state barges were enormous in length, each having forty or fifty rowers, those of the Maharaja being dressed in blue and those of the Resident in red.

Slowly the procession advanced round the bend of the river among the different fresh green shades of tall poplars and giant chinar trees, which together with the willows are a feature of the valley, their colours being set off and made the more beautiful by the background of snow-capped mountains, seeming the closer in the clean spring air, with the clear blue

sky forming a fitting ceiling to the picture. In later years the rowers were helped along by each of the barges having a motor boat to tow it up through the city, whilst the light blue police launch darted to and fro keeping the way clear, and the shikaras of officials placed themselves between the State barges and the hundreds of river craft which lined the banks.

Children cheering and waving flags were there on the steps and balconies of the schools which abut it. The Central Mission School usually contributed some original form of reception. On one occasion they suspended two ropes, one four feet above the other over the river; between these boys formed the letters WELCOME, and when the Maharaja's barge was close under them, the human letters dived from their overhead positions into the water beneath them, to the consternation of the police launch.

He would have gone on reminiscing had the light not flashed on to warn us to fix our safety belts since we were about to land. Then about an hour later, for one has to pass through a police check and a customs search, followed by a drive of many miles to Srinagar, we arrived in the houseboat which was moored on the river well above the city and among the many hundreds which line the river banks end on to each other, only being divided by their cook boats.

The houseboats are often as much as one hundred and fifty feet long and twelve feet wide with square ends, the hull made of deodar wood. A plank cat-walk runs along outside the wood panelled walls, and the windows are decorated with wood, much like leaded lights would be. Sitting-room and dining-room are separated, many having open fireplaces; the walls are covered with linen-fold panels of choice walnut or budloo pine, the ceilings decorated in intricate patterns of stars and such-like shapes all working one into the other, each the same size and shape, the whole consisting of hundreds of small slithers of wood dovetailed into their neighbours. Separating dining-room from bedrooms is the service pantry. A train-like corridor runs along the side of these bedrooms which are large and airy, each with its bathroom, the end room of all usually being a double one having two bathrooms. In the majority of the boats the roof portion over the lounge and dining-room is flat, edged

with pots of flowers and over it is a framework for an awning. The roofs above the bedrooms are usually hipped and covered with small wooden tiles, each of the windows topped with a gable, dormer fashion out of the sloping roof. The end of the sitting-room or lounge opens out on to a wide verandah—the end of the boat—and this is often completed with window boxes with flowers like those on the flat roof, with curtains similar to the awning and the blinds which are set out from each of the windows.

These boats remind one of the pictures of Noah's Ark. They are moored by chains to great wooden pegs driven into the river bank, with a plank gangway leading to them from the ground, whilst in most there is electric light which is supplied from lines which run along each bank. Once inside there is very little difference from living in a house on shore, the movement of the flat-bottomed boat being very slight even in the windy weather. To look out in the evening when the soft lights of other boats are reflected on the water, hear the gentle dip of pole or paddle and the soft ripple as the shikaras and barges move up and down the river is soothing to the busy town dweller, though it must be admitted that nothing can be more depressing that to sit in a houseboat on the river, or worse still on a lake, with rain drenching down, jumping like needles on the water all around.

The Colonel's houseboat was among the best owned by Europeans on the river. It was his home, everything he had collected during the years of service all over India and Burma was in it; Bokhara mats were spread out on Baluch carpets covering the floors. Inset in the two sliding doors from lounge to verandah were four stained-glass shields; in the one that of his Prep. School and of Rugby, his Public School, in the other the crest of Sandhurst and that of his regiment. Each piece of furniture had been carefully chosen, in most cases had been made specially to his order and design, the cabinet was filled with cups won for shooting, polo and racing; on the tables were silver-framed autographed photographs of maharajas, whilst the old personal bearer had been with him little short of the whole of his service. I afterwards found quite a number of boats owned by Indian Army officers much the same as his.

The cook boat which houses the families of the men who work as the manji, cook, khidmutgar, bhisti-masalchi and sweeper, on the houseboat, is about forty feet long and five feet wide. Its walls are sliding wood panels, the roof tiled with wood, and the boat divided into many rooms, each family sharing one portion. In the stern is the kitchen for the houseboat, the roof of this is hinged at the apex and opens up at the eaves to permit the smoke from the clay stove set on the floor to escape.

It is surprising the excellent meals that can be produced on a clay stove in a cook boat and kept to the correct heat in the houseboat's pantry tin-lined hot cupboard with a charcoal burner at the bottom. At dinner that evening my host commented, "I'm afraid you'll get a little fed up with the everlasting chicken, duck or mutton we get up here" and then went on to explain that the boatmen were all Muslim and would not cook or serve pork or bacon, the pig being an unclean animal to them, whilst with a Hindu Maharaja, the cow being sacred to them, no beef is to be had in the State; even beef extracts and tinned beef are forbidden entry into Kashmir and stopped at the Customs. After living in the dried-up plains where green vegetables were at a premium, it was a joy to have all those one had almost forgotten existed, and also to taste them, for those in the fast-growing tropical heat have no flavour, they are all the same, only their colour and substance differing.

Kashmir grows much of its own needs, those commodities which have to be imported, especially tinned goods, are taxed as they enter, yet despite this the cost of living to Europeans is about half that which it costs them in India, and the flat-bottomed little fruit and vegetable boats which come each morning to the houseboats are stacked with all that one would expect to buy either in India or Europe, the market gardeners growing for a market where they know they can be assured of a few annas more than from their own countrymen.

I can well remember the morning following my arrival, our sitting up on the flat roof having breakfast and watching the river moving slowly past below us. Great barges filled with rocks, long rafts of logs with a rush shanty built on one, a woman cooking outside it and a man guiding it with a long punt

pole, running backwards and forwards nimbly in bare feet to fend it one way and then the other.

Then came the little flat boats, a mass of colour with the vegetables and fruits; seeing the houseboat was occupied they made for the cook boat to get their orders from the manji or head man. Next came another which was a bower of flowers, each variety standing in earthenware pots; at first asking Bond Street prices and dropping without our saying a word to half—"Because you my very old customer, sahib," the man explained with a big grin to the Colonel. At the time I thought it a rather charming and an almost pathetic gesture, until I discovered that once one had bought from a Kashmiri trader you became "My very old customer, sahib!"

Hardly had they gone before we were invaded by a host of salesmen with all those things dear to the heart of the visitor to Kashmir, wood carving, papier mâché, fancy semi-precious jewellery, embroidery and so on. Later in the morning, usually during the afternoon, the gentlemen who consider themselves to be higher class salesmen arrive with furs, silk underclothing, carpets and precious stones. The Kashmiri is the most amazing and convincing salesman, meeting you with the sort of friendly nod or salute which makes you quite certain that you must know them, following it up with "And how are you today, sahib?" Then the tactics are so swift that almost before you know it has happened they are on the boat, their shikara boys are handing up their goods to them and your floor is covered with what they have to show you. In reply to your protests of not wanting to buy or having no money they exclaim, "Only look see, don't buy, sahib!" or else "Money? What is money, sahib, nothing! Look, sahib, you cannot eat money now can you?"

The boat's mooring ghat was up stream on the Jhelum River at that part where most of the officials had built their houses, being about two miles from the centre of the city proper. Most of the owners of the houseboats there are, and have been for many years, resident in Srinagar, among them a large percentage of retired civil servants or service people who have spent the greater part of their lives in the country, and now have few ties remaining 'at home'—sometimes they have tried to

live there but returned—having decided that they will be happier in Kashmir.

They could have chosen to hire a ghat from the State on either the lakes or any part of the river, but experience has proved to them that hereabouts are the best moorings, for although the water may not be crystal clear, here it has not been polluted by its passage through the city; here is protection by the close mountains from the cold winds, the sun shines for many hours upon the boats, since to the south the land is flat for many miles and in the winter when the overhanging willows are denuded of their leaves, the ever-flowing waters are warmer than the still ones of the lakes, and in the hot late spring and summer the cooling frothy snow waters are flowing past them.

The evening promenade is always along "The Bund" under the age-old chinar trees whose roots bind its earth; the sunsets, as one looks across the river through the tall poplars towards the distant snow-capped mountains have captivated not a few artists who have remained there many more months than they had at first intended, their work considered exaggerated by those who have not seen the glorious views.

There must be very few visitors who have gone to Srinagar and not been through the city by way of the river in a shikara—the water taxis which are a skiff, a punt and a canoe all in one, and propelled by a number of men who use either punt poles or heart-shaped paddles. These flat-bottomed boats are now fitted with spring mattress seats for two passengers who lie back luxuriously on brightly coloured cushions with legs outstretched, whilst the others find a place as best they can—usually on a hard board seat facing them. A plaited straw canopy with gay curtains—usually drawn back—covers the centre portion of the boat which is the part occupied by the passengers, whilst the hanjis are seated one behind the other in the stern.

I was more fortunate than most who go there, for my guide was my host, and one whose intense interest and knowledge of the valley was built on a foundation of many months spent each year in trekking, together with much reading, the shelves which surrounded his lounge like a dado being filled with

almost all the books which had been written about the country, its rulers, its peoples, their religions, the birds, fruits, flowers and fishes. There can be few works that he had not studied, being those on his own shelves, the libraries of the Srinagar Club and the Srinagar Museum, whilst his knowledge of Persian and Sanskrit had given him a far wider range than most people could cover. He spoke of the writers as though they were old friends of his, and it was quite a while before I discovered that some had been dead a few hundred years. So he showed me Srinagar, and later Kashmir, with as much pride and interest as an English country squire would conduct a visitor round his estate.

On the first evening we had walked up The Bund for about a mile and looked across the wide bend of the river; there he had pointed out a dry canal about a hundred and fifty yards wide, explaining that this is the overflow for the river during the spring months when the snows melt and the Jhelum rises, threatening the city. Through it the flood waters are carried away behind on a shorter route to join the river after its great bend through Srinagar. The original city was built on higher ground than the present one which became the capital of Kashmir in about A.D. 960, floods have wrought havoc among the people of Srinagar from time to time, and yet with all the efforts made to divert flood waters, they still take place, the flow of water with a rapid thaw being more than the river and the canals can cope with, so that even in recent years bridges have been swept away.

The following morning, lying back lazily in a shikara, and being paddled slowly down stream on the smooth waters of the river, we could just catch a glimpse of the red roofs of the houses in the European quarter, houses set in large gardens and built much like those you would see in England but with wide verandahs all round them on both floors. They are hidden from view by the high-built banks of the river—The Bund; but for this, even with the overflow canals, during the spring floods, that part of the city would be under water. At times, in spite of its being about twenty feet wide at the top, The Bund is burst by the pressure of the swirling waters; this happened as recently as 1950, then in their mad rush the waters

carried away fences and walls together with the wood and dried-mud brick homes of the poorer Kashmiris, and inundated the lower floors of the better-built houses in their dash toward the city.

A little further down stream and on the right bank are the two State guest houses set behind high white walls. From their garden gates, stone steps descend to the river where houseboats for hire are moored in the hopes of getting the overflow from the guest houses; in the old days none but those owned by the Maharaja were permitted to tie up there and the stone steps were kept clear.

Behind the white houses rises a thousand foot high hill with a small edifice on its summit lighted by a beacon at night. This is Takht-i-Sulaiman, a Hindu temple.

Further down stream we passed many houseboats bearing on their brass plates the names of people famous in Kashmir, such as that of Percy Brown whose wife has told of the enchantment of Kashmir in her delightful little book of poems *Chinar Leaves*. Across on the other bank we could see a small fishing village, the fishermen from which I soon got to know to be those who move up and down stream in the early morning waking one up by scraping their great nets under the houseboats in the hope of catching the small fish which hide there.

Over the top of the houseboats we could see the spire of All Saints' Church, its red, galvanised iron roof I found later on strolling along to see it, softened by the creepers which cover the walls and the splashes of colour in the delightful garden which surrounds it.

Just below this was pointed out to me the small canal which comes through from the Dal Gate—the entrance to the famous Dal Lake; this canal is usually crammed tight with houseboats and all but dry except during the spring and early summer.

Had we been walking it is here that we would first be asked by unseen men's voices below, "Shikara, sahib?", and looking down the flight of steps would have seen a dozen or more gay shikaras lying close together like sardines in a tin, the shikara wallahs, or hanjis as they are known there, lying back lazily

and languidly lifting a hand as you gaze down upon them; yet these fellows will happily paddle on for hours when called upon to do so.

Below this is the sedate Srinagar Club. In the past no self-respecting European could afford not to be a member of it. The previous evening I had been made a temporary member to find that it offered all those facilities common to clubs in England—the home of Clubs—whether they be in town or country. It is a comfortable little place, full of atmosphere with age-mellowed rooms reminding one very much of home. The attractive little club-house is built bungalow fashion on many levels on the inner side of The Bund; before it and on the outer side is an ugly mass of giant piers which shoot up from the river to support a large chinar-shaded verandah on which the members sit and watch the river life, where dances are held and which becomes attractive only at night when its dozens of coloured lanterns reflect on the water below and through the lattice screens.

Still further down stream is the wood-paling fence behind which stands the old British Residency—now used as a State Emporium. Red roofed, the house with its two picturesque gate houses is much like a hunting lodge in the Highlands of Scotland, seemingly built of red bricks in a skeleton of dark wood. The verandahed back of the house faces towards the river, which can only be seen from the upper rooms, the front looks out on to an English garden, the fresh, shaded lawns spread out like a sheet of velvet before it, and planted among the ever-present chinar and fir trees are beds of flowers known throughout Kashmir. Here were held the British Resident's famous tea parties which were a monthly feature of Srinagar, and to which all vied to be invited, they being equalled only by the Buckingham Palace garden parties in their importance to the people of Kashmir.

From the verandah of the large porch to the house, the most lovely view of the distant Takht-i-Sulaiman is to be had through the firs. With a carpet of colour at one's feet, a bare mountain with its temple on the summit, so framed becomes a thing of beauty. The Colonel was delighted to see that the gardens are still as well kept as ever before, commenting that it is good to

think that with the departure of the Resident, they were not allowed to fall back; though even were the colour of the flower beds to disappear, the shades of greens and blues of the trees with all except the firs changing to flame red and orange with the coming of autumn, could never be lost. There is a quiet and gentle dignity about the house, no ostentatious display of marble stairs or gilt domes, whilst the gate houses are just like gamekeepers' cottages.

Continuing down the river we passed the Post Office and the Bank, both blending with their surroundings, the builder of these not spoiling the charm of the water-front by their presence. Here are the many little shops with touts outside pestering visitors to "Only look, sahib—no need to buy—only look Kashmir wood carving, embroidery work, papier mâché. You come my shikara, sahib. I show you my factory near third bridge. No? Well, sahib, only tell me your houseboat name, then I come show you my goods—best quality in all Kashmir. I no tell lie, sahib. No? Well then you take my card, sahib!" "Take his card for God's sake, then he'll worry you no more!" my guide said, and he was right, for they soon get to know you after going along The Bund a few times and cease to worry you, just as he was right about the beggars which are of all sorts and kinds, mostly professional, insisting that if I must give, I only drop an anna or two to those who were really village men. The others, he explained, are all kept by one man, receiving food and a bed in return for what they manage to collect during the day, however small or great; the woman beggar being provided with a child to carry in her arms, either drugged to encourage sympathy, or pinched by her to make the poor little scrap cry pitifully to draw your attention and the money out of your pockets.

Further on is a building much like a young castle right before The Bund and with stone steps leading up from the water to the inside of the building. It is a quaint house, no one seems to know the purpose for which it was originally built, the most popular belief being a school. The broken-down hovels which from now on crowd The Bund until the Law Courts are reached, were the "dirty dens of vice" serving that part of the city until the Maharaja had the inmates turned out of them. It

would have been best had the "houses" been burned down at the same time for they spoil an otherwise tidy Bund.

It was here, at this part of the river, that my attention was first drawn to a square building on the other bank. This is the Lal Mandi, which was built as a royal guest-house and a banqueting hall by the Maharaja Sir Partab Singh, uncle of the last Maharaja. It is now the State Museum and Library in which are housed the many precious Kashmir shawls, pieces of armoury and architectural discoveries, together with a considerable library of old books and writings on Kashmir, written in English, Persian and Sanskrit. But it will be a long time before one will see them so poorly presented. The priceless wonderful shawls are so folded that their beauty is not seen; all the pieces are housed in glass cases with heavy, much painted wood surroundings to the small glass panels, and the whole place is aged and begrimed. I was amazed that from among the apparent chaos of the library, the head clerk was able to produce in a few minutes the books I particularly wanted. No doubt great treasures are housed in the building. What they need is a Carnegie to provide sufficient money to put them in order and display them as they deserve.

The river widens, taking a great sweep, with the banks thick with freight barges and from now on there are no houseboats, only these clumsy craft built on thick, rough-cut timbers spliced into each other and held in place by iron rivets which look more like great stitches. They are made with flat bottoms and sides narrowing to both bow and stern and carry heavy loads like stone, bricks, earth and logs down the river, while their more slender sisters are used for the transportation of rice, at times being cleaned and hired out for river carnivals. The larger ones, called *bahach*, can carry a cargo of up to one thousand maunds. The smaller ones, known as *wor*, take a cargo of four hundred maunds. They are moved along by heavy punt poles, the man or woman fixing the steel pointed end on the hard bed of the river and then placing the butt against the shoulder, they walk, pressing down hard against the pole and go from the bow to the middle of the craft—usually walking over the load which is being carried; by that means forcing the barge along. At such places where there is a tow path or fields, a

rope is tied to the bow and men pull the boat along. In the stern sits an old man or woman no longer able to work on the heavy punt poles, but now steering with a giant oar. The pity of it is that one so often sees women heavy with child working the boats up river, sometimes with the only pole, whilst her husband sits smoking his hukka and steering.

These people live in their boats, their quarters in the stern being a small covered-in compartment which does not reach to the very end, for here the rudder oar is worked, here is to be found the open clay stove-cum-range on which the family's food is cooked, here the men take a bath—very occasionally, here the goat must travel to provide the milk, whilst over the roof and the load the chickens run, somehow keeping their balance. Here the old father sits and smokes while his wife takes the tiller and his sons and daughters-in-law force the boat along as he did for them over so many years when they were children and he and his old woman alone had to push or pull the heavy boat up river together with the years from their life's span.

In winter the fire is made inside the compartment; at times the whole thing catches alight, for these people are careless, but what does it matter, water to extinguish the flames is an arm's length away and to be had for the dipping.

Other boats were there also, old *dungas*—much the same shape but slimmer, the whole being used for living accommodation with rush mats to cover the sides. As we passed them a woman was sitting holding a piece of stick with a cotton—much as the boys do at home—and it is surprising how many small fish the size of sprats can be caught in this way, more so in the side canals. Another woman was hanging out and sloshing a pot in the river and then carefully draining the water away, she was cleaning rice; others were doing their washing up in the same way, while yet another was holding a baby over the same water and teaching him to be house trained with such good manners as his father was then displaying at the other end of the boat.

The boats of the bigger contractors—however rich they become they prefer to live on the river—have double-decked young houseboats built on them, elaborately decorated with

many verandahs and gables, the rooms small but each housing a son with his own family. The roofs are shingled, that is they are tiled with wooden slats, the windows glazed, the family kitchen is in the stern, ducks float around the boat which is permanently in a mooring.

Just here we came upon the Amiran Kadal, the first of the seven bridges across the river, and the longest of them all. The piers are of stone, the bridge of great timbers; it carries the road to Baramula.

After passing under it we were confronted on the left with the great white palace of the Maharaja, which during the time of Hari Singh, the last of them, was converted into Government offices. A grand white double staircase with fine ornamental balustrades passes up from the water-front to the river entrance. Through the large plate glass windows can be seen tiger skins stretched across the walls. The waterway is now crowded with rice barges and freight barges; in the days not far off none were permitted to moor anywhere near to it, the front of the palace was then spotless and relieved only by the different shaped and coloured State barges, known as *parindas* or fliers, each having forty or fifty rowers dressed in gorgeous blue and gold uniforms, the canopy beneath which the Maharaja sat being gilded. From a shikara one does not have the view spoilt by the unpainted galvanised roof which ruins an otherwise imposing building. Attached to it, also on the water-front, is the Golden Temple—the top is gilded—with modern thief-protecting steel lattice gates. The jewels on the idols were said to be worth a fortune.

Within the same garden walls of the Shergarhi, is the red brick building in which lived the women of the Maharaja's household. Behind them all and just outside the high brick walls, there used to be a row of small shops in which were housed the "priests" who made, painted and sold the "unseemly illustrated sex literature for which Kashmir was well known until the turn of the century". Of his exposure of these dens and their final removal and obliteration, the late Reverend Tyndale-Biscoe writes in his last book.

The waters of the Dal Lake, which pass through the Dal Gate, flow along the Tsunt Kol or Tsunt-i-Kul, a canal which empties

itself into the river on the left bank. Below this is the Basant Bagh ghat which has the grandest flight of steps down to the Jhelum in all Srinagar. The stone, which comes from the beautiful Hassanabad mosque built in Akbar's time by the Muslims of the Shia sect, was pillaged from there in about the year 1874 by Colonel Main Singh, the Sikh Governor at the time of terrible religious strife accompanied by bloodshed, fire, plunder and the usual indiscriminate and unnatural rapings. From these steps in the old days a rope was run over to the palace and on it petitions from his loyal subjects were sent to the Maharaja.

Again on the left bank is the entrance to the Kota Kol, or Kut-i-Kut, the overflow canal which cuts short the great curve the river now takes, and carries water from it to prevent flooding at that part of the city as the Jhelum narrows, re-entering it way down below the sixth bridge. This I found to be a useful waterway when returning, if one has no calls to make and has some sympathy for the shikara wallahs, since poles can be used to push the boat up stream—these men then use a pole as Europeans do with a punt—the flow not being so strong as that of the main river. It must be admitted though that it was very seldom that I managed to get through without a considerable amount of excited shouting and swearing—in Kashmiri—at the boats which choked it, while here and there the stench of bad garbage was pretty powerful.

On the banks of the Kota Kol canal, in what was once a royal garden are now built forty great rat and fire proof, beehive-shaped Government Granaries in each of which can be stored up to four hundred tons of rice and corn brought in from the villages to feed the people of Srinagar, it having long been the practice to ensure that however poor the crop, the city must not go short. The rice was being carried in bags on the backs of coolies from the barges below, a graduated path winding round and round the granary, much like the slide of a fair-ground slip-in-the-slip, the entrance to the store being near to the top.

Back in the main river again we passed the houses of relations of the Maharaja, Police Headquarters and numbers of schools all mixed up with a conglomeration of the most ramshackle wooden houses, leaning at all angles and against each other as

though drunk; it seemed as though they were fighting to get to the water-front. The people were overflowing on to the precarious little verandahs before each tiny room, which are four and five stories high. Even then, although they appear as if they will collapse at any moment, here and there new rooms were being added—still retaining the odd angle, which must mean going up or down hill when one moves across a room. It was as though all the architects had been squint or cross-eyed and the builders had never heard of the most primitive of plumb-lines or spirit levels. Some of these houses are over a hundred years old; it is their very looseness which has permitted them to withstand the many earthquakes which Srinagar has suffered when houses of stronger and firmer construction have collapsed.

Between gaps in the houses we would see dingy, dim alleys sloping up from the water, many with stone steps; here men and women were standing knee deep in the river and washing clothes; little soap is used, for they rely on whacking the dirt out on the steps or some convenient stone. Naked boys were splashing about in the water, scrambling over some of the moored boats or the great rafts of logs which had been floated down stream. Here and there were the bathing huts; peculiar to Srinagar, they consist of a raft made up of three logs across which at equal distance are four others. Two lean-to huts each divided into some three or four compartments are then fitted facing each other on the sides—these resting on two of the logs lengthways and leaving a space between, over which a board floor is built. Sacking covers the fronts of each compartment and so the bathing hut is complete with ladies on one side and gentlemen on the other. To take a bath the occupant simply gets inside, hangs his or her clothes up and is already sitting in the water, for there are no floors and only a pole across each compartment on which to sit.

It was usual to see the centre portion occupied by some who, after taking their bath, were washing the clothes they had discarded.

These bathing huts rise and fall with the level of the river. I heard that during the floods they frequently break adrift and have to be towed back into position from far down the river; they often return broken, but an odd piece of wood or a strip of

sacking soon puts that right and they are in use again, although it is then rather like taking a bath in a conservatory.

From the side roads the gutters emptied themselves into the river, the banks were often used as public conveniences and garbage was thrown there to be sorted over by pi-dogs after it worked its way into the river which had by this time changed in density, though it was never crystal clear even a mile up stream; but still people bathed, still the women in the boats did their washing-up in it and strained clean their rice; no wonder one hears that cholera spreads alarmingly when it breaks out in Srinagar.

Haba Kadal, the second bridge, named after a poetess queen of Kashmir, is in the busiest centre of the city, with shops, houses, stores, both old and new all falling over each other, the streets jammed and the bridge crowded with people, small traders sitting behind baskets of fruit and vegetable, a chaotic muddle typical of all Far East markets, the noise, the flies and stench of foods beyond description whilst it seemed as though the entrance to each end of the bridge must be the meeting place of the entire population of Srinagar.

Proceeding down river we passed Rugh Nath Mandir, the biggest Hindu temple in all Kashmir. It is one of those buildings which exist to torment the photographer, whose view of it from the river is blocked by a building covering the flight of stone steps which lead down under an arch from the temple to the river. The only possible shot I found was from behind, when it became necessary to stand legs apart over a stinking gutter in a filthy alleyway, but then the view in colour was excellent, for to one side was a picturesque house with carved, chocolate-shade woodwork and an overhanging first floor, its rail festooned with scarlet chillies strung out to ripen and dry and looking like tiny Chinese lanterns.

Further down river is a building interesting to all Englishmen; it is built of wood, with a large overhanging upper storey held from dropping into the river by poles set upright from the rocks below, and with a flag flying over the highest of its many roofs. This is the Central Mission Boys High School, made famous by the late Canon Tyndale-Biscoe, a Cambridge blue who according to his own books "spent a lifetime in making men; who found a

nation of weak and effeminate boys and showed them how to play, to study and to work," from whose classes came most of the men who are now of any count in Srinagar. From the windows of the upper storeys these boys had learned to dive into the river beneath. Attached to the verandah was still to be seen one of the many school mottoes, "What do they say. Let them say what they say". I have since known many Kashmiris who to prove immediately their honesty, quality and worth have within a few minutes of our meeting told me of their being educated at the school with as much pride as we would have mentioned our University.

We were almost upon the Fateh Kadal, the third bridge. Until 1950 it remained as it had been built almost from the time a bridge was first made there in A.D. 1499 but the floods of that year washed it away to such an extent that a new generation now replaces it, built by present-day engineers who have done their best to retain some of the characteristics of the old bridge. The current is strong here, swirling past the piers.

The great-grandfather of these bridges was one of boats made at the same time as the city by King Pravarasena II. Those which followed were picturesque and crudely built and have gradually been washed away in the floods or broken beyond repair to be replaced by others of modern structure. Today only one stands as they were originally made, on stacks of logs on the cantilever principle, the foundation of the pier consisting of a barge loaded with great rocks and then sunk; round this stakes were driven and tied together with horizontal logs, the whole being filled with more rocks to save its being either carried away by the river or knocked out of place by one of the hundreds of large barges which crowd and ply the waterway. I have since seen old sketches and photographs of these bridges: they were certainly colourful, many with large flowering trees growing from the sides of the piers, others with small shops on them—rather like miniatures of the old London Bridge.

Here the river was narrowed down and the flow made greater, especially round the great piers between which it swirled, so that the boatmen coming up stream clung tenaciously to the banks, the paddlers standing up and helping themselves along by holding to the barges moored there and forcing their boats along,

while those going down remained in the middle of the river, merely using their paddles as rudders, and shouting to a boatman who was struggling to cross from one bank to the other, to clear out of the way. The rule of the river at all places is guided by common sense, down stream in the middle, up stream close to the banks. Passing the barges and looking into their kitchens is rather like coming in by railway to a town and looking right into the gardens of the houses backing on to the line.

All around are the showrooms and shops and workrooms—they call them factories—of the fancy trades of Kashmir. Embroidery work, papier mâché, silverware and wood carving, not forgetting the wonderful shawls, with the traders' boards hanging out even from the topmost floors, whilst when I looked up, a watcher from above immediately invited us to "Only see—don't buy, sahib!" the age-old cry of the Srinagar merchants with the friendly intimate smile.

Soon, on the right bank, we came upon the Mosque of Shah-i-Hamadan. Built after the fashion of a Buddhist temple, of small wood bricks, the roof is flattish and in layers, being of wooden boarding covered with turf, green in the spring, brown in summer; the whole surmounted by an open spire with a gilded ball. From the corners of the overhanging eaves bells are suspended. Here we got out of the shikara to look at it, for this is one of the most important mosques of Srinagar, the floors being completely covered with valuable carpets, the ceilings drip with lovely chandeliers festooned with hundreds of lustres, the supporting pillars inlaid with glistening stones, the walls painted in multicoloured designs and the windows attractively carved.

Within it there is a spring which is sacred to the Hindus and dedicated to Kali, the goddess of nature. Beneath the mosque and right on the water-front, is a Hindu temple which is much used. To the passer-by who did not know, it appears to be nothing more than a splash of orange paint on the stone wall under the water-front pathway to the mosque.

Lower down on the left is another interesting mosque. This is the Pathar Masjid, said to have been built of limestone which is believed to have been the looted steps which led up the hill to the Takht-i-Sulaiman. It was built by Queen Nur Mahal, and since a woman built it, the Muslims refuse to worship there.

Zaina Kadal, the fourth bridge, is close by, and passing under it my attention was drawn to a rather magnificent wooden house on the right bank which one of the boatmen told us was built by a merchant who controlled all the pashmina wool which came into Srinagar; such are the profits to be made from that commodity.

Close by is the tomb of Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din, one of the most renowned of early Muslim kings of Kashmir who died in 1470. Built of red brick, it is enclosed in a stone wall, the inscriptions found on fragments discovered within these walls were in the Piri character and among the oldest in Kashmir. There is an odd belief there that the sores of smallpox can be cured by being rubbed in water with a brick from the Bad-Shah.

The fifth bridge, Ali Kadal, which is now rebuilt as a foot-bridge, had as its ancestor the grandfather of all the roadway bridges, that having been erected in the year A.D. 1417.

Temples with their shining silver domes outnumber the mosques as we pass one after the other. We find that the river now starts to clean up and widens; here and there trees overhang the waters and the high stone walls protecting the gardens above are crowned with flowering creepers which drip their colour to the waters.

Then the sixth bridge which is the last remaining of those built on the old pattern. This one is now a little bent and out of level in its road surface. The baulks of timber and the great rocks are still rustic and beautiful, their usefulness and strength proved by the years they have stood up even to modern traffic. Below on the left bank is the Kota Kol canal, which branched off just after our passing the first bridge and now re-enters the river.

Saffa Kadal, the seventh bridge, "The bridge of departure", has close by it the Serai in which the Yarkand traders stay with their merchandise, their caravans arriving during the autumn. Just below is the weir holding back the water during the winter months so that the river is always navigable. A large lock which can take many barges and the biggest houseboat is at one side to lift or lower them up or down river. Standing on the bank we watched the hundreds of silver flashes as fish leapt the swift running waters flowing over the weir. Usually slow in moving,

as though tomorrow will always do, it is surprising how the boatmen suddenly decide that there is reason to hurry through the lock, the incoming ones pushing against those endeavouring to get out with threats, screams and shouts, together with distant brandishing of fists, but seldom with blows, for the Kashmiri is no fighter.

Down below the weir are more boats, these are the homes of those who before worked on the river and now seek employment in the city, but cannot bear to leave the water to be cramped up in the dog-kennel-like rooms of the houses; here they still enjoy freedom of space. Among the boats were a few old houseboats which were said to be floating brothels in many cases. They were easy to pick out with the impudent laughing girls at the windows, and on the flat roofs the boys with grey-blue eyes either downcast or apparently looking over one's shoulder and into the distance when you look them full in the face. They were outside the city, in an excellent position for their trade, being accessible to the river by shikara, or the road by tonga.

CHAPTER TWO

By River to Baramula

A FEW days later we went further down the Jhelum River, down as far as Baramula a distance by water of nearly twice the thirty-four road miles. This time we travelled by *dunga*—really the forerunner of the luxurious houseboats and now only used by visitors when narrow canals or rivers have to be navigated.

The *dunga* is much the same as the present-day cook boat, except that most of them have matting walls which are rolled up during the day and the roofs are still quite frequently made of close-knit rush matting. Each boat has its living-room forward, aft of which is the open verandah-like portion which is sometimes used as an extra summer room, while astern are the bedrooms and bathroom. Oil lamps are used and these *dungas* can be made quite comfortable for fishing, shooting expeditions, or as a base for trekking.

As we moved down river we must have appeared a strange string of boats, for the cook boat, which we had taken from the houseboat, was far superior—outwardly at least—to the *dunga*. Behind the cook boat which was astern of us, trailed a shikara followed by two duck punts. The boatmen, one working on each side, helped the *dunga* down stream with their long poles while the wife of one of the men sat at the stern with a large oar ready to guide the boat when they needed it. The windows of the cook boat seemed to be overflowing with women and children—Kashmiris have large families and although I have been there many times I have yet to sort out which child belongs to which man or woman in the boat crew.

We fed as we went down stream, the cooking going on as we moved along, the khidmutgar putting on his white jacket,

turban and wide coloured belt before serving us, carrying each dish along the frail cat-walk from the far end of the cook boat, and attending to us just as he had done on the houseboat.

One imagined that the *dunga* could be snug; unlike the furnishing of a yacht, table and chairs were of the folding camp variety, the beds the collapsible canvas shikari pattern.

Kashmir felt wool numdas covered the wooden floors which were so highly polished that as you stepped on them the mats slipped about; as in the houseboat, the bathroom was at the end with a large oval galvanised bath tub, and one's clothes had to be hung up on hooks strapped round the posts which supported the roof and formed uprights for the dividing walls. There were three bedrooms with no separating corridor, the one nearest the bathroom being used as a store for tent and trekking equipment.

We made the trip leisurely, after passing through the lock at the weir, tying up to the bank for the night and often for meals; still the service was the same, hot baths, hot meals perfectly served; within a short time of our touching the river bank, the people of the village nearby came out with chicken, eggs and vegetables for the cook to buy, still milk and cream were to be had in plenty, still the khidmutgar managed to find flowers for the table.

This great river forms the main arterial drainage system for the valley's lakes and rivers. It rises in a spring of deep blue water which issues from the bottom of a high scarp of a mountain spur at Verinag, and flows placidly on towards Baramula. Sluggishly it winds its way, for the valley is very flat; in places the banks have been built high to save it from flooding the surrounding countryside when it is in full spate. From its source to the gorge at Baramula is about a hundred and thirty-two miles, yet by road it is but eighty-five miles, some of its great loops bringing it to within a quarter of a mile of meeting. On these the design of the world-famous Kashmir shawls were made, not as is generally believed on the fruit of the mango, a tree not found in the valley.

It is a strange sensation when, standing up in the *dunga*, one suddenly realizes that the land beyond the river bank is many feet lower than the river which has been built up through the

centuries to prevent its flooding the valley; in places it is almost like an aqueduct. This land was either cultivated or else had become a marshland, the water remaining there being unable to drain away.

The boatmen did not work hard; we moved along at about one and a half miles an hour, so that it was quite easy to go ashore, look around and keep up with the *dunga*. The fields were pale green with ripening rice and maize, or golden with mustard, and broken up by graceful groves of willows, sentinel-like poplars and laden fruit trees, the latter I afterwards saw in the spring when the apple and pear trees were a mass of white blossom and the almonds a dainty pink, shedding their petals at the height of their beauty.

Shadipur was the first large village. It is at a point where the waters of the Sind River flow into the Jhelum, and as is so often found in Kashmir, translated, the name Shadipur has a pretty meaning—"The marriage of the waters". Below this there is a carefully protected little island on which is a chinar tree which locals declare never grows in size; it is held in great reverence by the Hindu. The Nuru Canal branches off just here, running through to the town of Baramula and avoiding the Wular Lake. A rather fine bridge spans the canal, and across from Shadipur is another large grove of magnificent chinar trees. We joined up with a number of houseboats moored there; among the owners was an old friend of the Colonel's. Soon the subject under discussion was a favourite of his—water; we had brought a few tanks of drinking water down from the city. Mostly for my benefit the subject switched over to cholera and how it was carried down by the river, so that by the time they had finished over a few before-dinner sherries, I found myself wondering if I dare ask the bearer whether the bath water came from the river or was from that which we had brought. I discovered that our men had been over with the shikara to refill our empty cans from the Sind River, the waters of which come from the snows and glaciers at Sonamarg. There were some very fine flocks of geese here, the price asked being four rupees each. On hearing this the two old men threw up their hands in horror reminding each other of the time when hundreds of the pick of them were to be had for one rupee eight annas each; the price of ducks was

now two and a half rupees each, and they refused to understand why it was this should have gone up when they find their own food.

The following day we moved for some hours up the Sind River until we reached Ganderbal which sits at the foot of Mount Harawar whose peak rises to a height of well over eleven thousand feet and round which the Sind River winds. We had been warned of sandbanks, for the river was low, and passed a houseboat which had stuck on one, but the *dunga* is a useful craft, taking less water than its bigger sister and getting through narrow passages, besides being easier to move off when it does get stuck.

Ganderbal was a favourite place for houseboats, with shady camping grounds all along and on both sides. It is from here that they start out up the river to Sonamarg and for Ladakh. The water is many degrees cooler than in the Jhelum and this was immediately noticeable; it must be a delightful spot in the heat of the summer when the hot humid air clings to the valley and the snows are fast melting and coming down the river.

Climbing part of the way up the mountain we could look over the marshes, through which runs a road and see in the distance the city of Srinagar. From there, I realized how much in the hollow of the valley the city had been built. The original one built by the Hindus was higher up and on ground which never became flooded, but when Akbar, the very first of the Moghul Emperors came, he selected for his city of Nagar the slopes of the Hari Parbat, on which he built a fort; this was on the right bank of the river. Those who succeeded him closed the entrance to the Dal Lake which was as it were a flood lung for the river, and finally the Pathan rulers built their palace on the left bank so that the city was spread out over the whole, the houses crowding down to the water while many built walls of stone to hold it back from inundating their gardens and so prevented the river's expansion when the floods came.

The following day we moved down stream again to the Jhelum and continued our journey. Sumbal was the next large village, one which boasts a bridge crossing the river. On the nearby marshes there was some excellent snipe shooting to be had. We stopped a night and a day, and taking the shikara, with

all but one of the boatmen and their families, went through a canal on to the Manasbal Lake. The waters are deep and clear. Glorious pink lotus lilies stand on the surface on its margins and behind it rises a mountain, its contrasting colour a joy to look at. The lake is unusual in that it has some hot springs which never freeze over even during the coldest of winters.

I was taken over to the upper end to be shown the old Fakir's garden which is still known for its grapes and peaches. We looked into his cave which, it is said, he intended should be his grave, but for some reason, now unknown, he was buried outside in his garden.

It is said that the Moghul Emperors built a garden here, with a small summer house with a great bow window at which the Empress used to sit looking over the cool waters and enjoying the cool breezes which are so often present when the rest of the valley is still and baked with the heat. It is just possible to make out its three terraces.

At the edge of the lake we found the small roof of a temple showing above the soil, doubtless at some time the water had risen, the soil had gradually crept up round the building, and when the water receded, the building itself was lost to view. We walked the mile or so back to the river, passing on our way many old ruins of ancient buildings with their great stone water-tanks still as good as they were when built though now covered with green slime; in spite of this the people use them for bathing, pushing aside the covering to make for themselves a place to stand in. In Kashmir the men are not so modest as those in India where they always keep a loin cloth around them even when they take a bath; here, only if you have women with you do they trouble to step deeper into the pool or sit down in the water until you have passed by.

Moving down stream next day, the boatmen were not allowed to use their poles or paddles. Like us they cast out their rods and from Sumbal to Hajan we must have hooked a hundred fish between us. Those we caught ourselves and could not eat, we passed back to the cook boat; two days later I discovered what they did with them when I called for one of the duck punts, for it stank of dried fish, those which they had split and spread out in the sun to dry.

The whole way from Srinagar we had moved slowly north-west. At last we had reached the Wular Lake which is in the extreme north of the valley. For miles we had moved down a channel through marshlands so that it was difficult to know when we were actually on the lake. In the spring and summer the lake becomes the largest sheet of fresh water in the Indian continent, in winter it shrinks with the flow of the river, so that its shores are ill-defined, its depth increasing as the many rivers feed it, and in the autumn and winter consists of miles of marshlands with reeds growing. It forms a kind of settling tank for the Jhelum, thus preventing the valuable loamy rich deposit of its muddy waters from being exported by Nature to the Punjab. Flowing in a coffee colour, it emerges a sage green shade, almost opaque. In autumn this rich deposit which becomes dry land, shows how much goodness has been retained in the valley.

The deepest part of the lake is on the far north-west side and near to the hill with twin peaks named Baba Shurkar-ud-din. On the actual hill top is a shrine, that of a saint-disciple of Shekh Nur-i-Din, the national saint who is believed to have been converted from Hinduism. The boatmen leave money here to ensure a safe passage over the waters of the dreaded lake. Nearby the rocks run down to the lake—at low water there is a lovely little shingle beach, above it a grassy sward with rose bushes and iris clumps, while not far out into the lake a most curious bubbling spring discloses its presence on the surface. Near here is the Mota Khom, a name unpleasantly translating into "The Gulf of Corpses" since the current carries all those drowned in the river and lake to that part, and the people who live thereabouts believe that the lake has djinns—or gods of the lake—who claim their victims at times. On the north-east end, the spurs of Mount Haramouk run right down to the shore.

Because of its relative position to the mountains a storm will sweep down the mountains' gorges from Erin and over Bandipura during the evenings with little warning, whipping the still surface of the lake into a sea with rolling waves on which no flat-bottomed boat can stay afloat, so that here on the lake many lives have been lost and none who have once experienced such a storm will attempt to make a crossing with a *dunga* or house-

boat other than in the early mornings, for even in the afternoons there are frequent high winds.

Yet sailing before the noon hour on the Wular Lake can be delightful; good fishing is to be had there, especially mahseer which travel right up from the sea through the rivers Indus and Jhelum, whilst in the breeding season great flocks of wild duck come to nest among the weeds and willows, making it one of the most favoured of spots for duck shooting. All around in these reedy jheels, among the groves of trees, are the breeding grounds of coot, goose, herons and mallard; flocks of teal spread the surface of the lake, just far enough off to tantalize the sportsman, out of whose reach they always are. Occasionally an osprey is seen, standing as though asleep, but suddenly darting down on one of the dozens of tiny fish. Gulls scream as they hover over the boats.

We moored at Kiahnus, a place considered to be one of the best and safest for houseboats on the lake. Unluckily it was the season for mosquitoes; I was fortunate in my host being well prepared with nets for the beds and a good supply of Joss sticks which by their fumes kept us free of the brutes but smelling like a Hindu Temple at festival time.

Those were indeed wonderful days for me. The manji was an excellent shikari, and the Colonel and I each took a duck punt spending the time fishing or shooting. When we were out for duck we would separate and move slowly and quietly in, the Colonel with his manji as boatman, his old bearer as loader—this fellow was so old that one could imagine him loading muzzle guns with powder, shot and a wad—whilst I had my own Pathan bearer, and the manji's son as my boatman, he was a first-class fisherman and shikari, who although always acknowledging to his father's superior experience, undoubtedly had far more knowledge than he of both gun and line.

We all lay as flat as we could in the punts, were covered with rushes and the boatman slowly and carefully dipping his paddle hardly disturbed the surface of the water, moving as silently as the pirates who attacked the sleeping ship one so well remembered from school-boy days.

At dawn and dusk when the birds are flighting, there are so many hundreds of them that their numbers made shooting a

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slaughter which hardly seemed sportsmanship, it being impossible to miss. Besides which there was the question as to where to dispose of them.

The duck we got were young, plump and as we proved a day later, very tender, for there is good feed for them on the lake and in the marshland.

In the Wular Lake grows the strangest of fruits, this is the singhara or water-chestnut and the State collects a fee for letting out the rights. Although the white flowers bloom on the water, as the seeds come they sink below the surface and this strange fruit ripens under water. To gather them the boatmen drive a pole upright into the bed of the lake and tie their boat to it by a long rope. Pulling it out to the fullest extent they then row round and round shortening the rope's length as they go and pushing the nuts towards the pole. They are then scooped up in a net fitted at the end of a stick.

The kernel of the nut, which is white and mealy, is eaten either fried or, after being boiled, is ground into a coarse kind of flour.

The Wular is a fascinating sheet of water for sportsmen, but one is always being reminded of the ill fate of the many who have lost their lives in it. It is said that where the lake now is there was once a city which was swallowed up in an earthquake, the river then flooding and forming the lake. Wular certainly does mean "cave" and with that some suggestion of an earthquake, but I am more inclined to agree with Dr. Buhler's translation from the Sanskrit name of "Ullola" which means "high going waves" since the fear of these is always present among those who earn their living on its waters and who to this day declare that they have at very low waters seen what remains of that wicked city.

The great king Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din had an island built in the then centre of the lake as a refuge for boatmen in the event of a sudden storm, but the lake's shape has now so changed that this island is almost in one corner of it. There is a very old brick building, almost a ruin, still standing upon it and built in A.D. 1443.

The fishermen have an odd way of making their catches here. A fleet of about half a dozen boats form themselves into a large

half-circle, each of the boats has a large-sized net hinged on a pole; the net, as wide as the boat's length, is stretched out at the mouth much like a shrimping net, but is so large that it takes more than one man to handle it. These nets they drop into the water, each touching the other so that a large crescent is formed of them. Two boats which have broken away very quietly from the others, then start rowing noisily towards the nets, the men and boys slashing the water with sticks and thus driving the fish into the waiting trap. This method of catching is used in all seasons, even when the fishermen are protected by blankets over their clothes, for the lake can be bitterly cold during the winter months. Having made their catch, they huddle down on the bottom of the boat and each tucks his kangra, or fire basket, under his blanket to warm himself up again.

The kangra is peculiar to Kashmir. It consists of a round open basket with handles fixed over the top and an earthenware lining. Live willow-twig charcoal is put into the pot and covered with powdered charcoal made from chinar leaves, and the basket then tucked under the voluminous gown worn by the peasants, be they man or woman, or under a blanket thrown over the shoulders to form a cape. One can either sit down with this individual fire-place on the ground, or carry it along, the arms being drawn back out of the wide sleeves, so keeping the hands warm also.

Leaving the lake, we passed through a narrow portion of the Jhelum as it again forms itself into a river, and on through Sopor, a pleasant little village from which the Nuru Canal runs up to Shadipore, very useful in stormy weather on the lake; unfortunately the canal is only passable when the water is high. We had thought of taking the boat up the Pohru River to where there are some forest huts, but the water there was also too low.

Further on we came to Baramula, the principal town of the valley below Srinagar, and like it built on either bank of the Jhelum. Here the river spreads out and becomes nearly a hundred yards wide, yet half a mile below it narrows, the mountains hemming it in so that, especially in the spring, the waters dash madly and furiously through the narrow gorge, becoming a series of rapids over dangerous hidden rocks, only

the massive high-sided boats used in the timber trade then attempting a passage through its fury.

Efforts were made from time to time to deepen the great gorge near to Baramula and so prevent many of the valley's floods, since this is the bottle-neck for the waters trying to escape from it. History tells that in the reign of King Avantivarman the engineer Suyya tried it; another unsuccessful attack was made by engineers in the year 1902. But since that time much has been done with electric dredgers which either sucked the rocks up, or, if they were too large, gripped them in giant claws and deposited them along the banks thus deepening the river bed and permitting a greater flow of water at a lower level. Before this, in the course of as little as two or three days the greater part of the valley was at times flooded with the rapid flow of water resulting from heavy rains or a sudden thawing of the snows on the mountains.

Suyya's "engineering" methods were amusing if not original. It is said that he got the king to give him much money from his treasury, then cast coins into the water round the obstructing stones. The news spread quickly and in their eagerness to gather the money the men of Baramula, who were at that time suffering from scarcity, lifted out all the boulders and so cleared a deeper passage for the waters to escape.

Baramula is not a very impressive town; it is a mass of dilapidated houses in dirty narrow streets or alleys. There must be about a thousand houses there, for above the town the hills close in, so allowing little space for building, hence the crowding.

The road to Srinagar is lined by stately poplars, which in the spring are pale green and silver, in the autumn a dull gold. These were originally planted by the Empress Nur Jahan, wife of the great Moghul Emperor Jehangir.

The town was almost completely laid low by a most terrible earthquake in the year 1885. At that time its old Sikh fort was left a mass of ruins. Opposite this fort a wooden bridge spans the Jhelum, and on the other side is an old Moghul serai.

A little below the town there is an ancient gateway and the remains of some age-old fortifications, near which there is a spring which remains at the same temperature of about sixty-five degrees the whole year round; the water is impregnated

with sulphurated hydrogen and the people of the place tell of wonderful cures from many sicknesses brought about by either washing in it or drinking it. Having stood and watched some of the filthy diseased human beings who were washing there, I can hardly imagine anyone knowingly drinking of it, yet we were told that hundreds of bottles of the water were sent by one particular local "doctor" to all parts of the valley, and upon our appearing dubious at his assurance that "high ranking British officers, who swear by its cure, write and ask for further supplies," he brought out the usual book cover containing letters which were most certainly sent from many Officers' Messes and others written by Europeans in India, including one titled woman.

From Baramula an excellent road has been built following the Jhelum through the mountain gorges. There is the ruin of a Hindu temple said to date from the first century A.D. Later large numbers of fine deodars—the trees from which the heavy boats are made—cover the steep cliffs, and eventually after some sixteen miles, we came upon Rampore which is famed for its natural beauty of high limestone cliffs and precipices. From the face of these, water is taken from the river Jhelum and run through wooden channels to drop finally through great iron pipes for nearly four hundred feet to the turbines which develop the electric power needed in Srinagar and the valley.

So road follows river, the rock substances changing with the miles. At times during the year, the loose shale falls and blocks the road. In some places the road is cut out of the rock face, leaving the precipice sheer down to the river below, and the solid rock overhanging it. Many gorges have to be crossed, but the old wooden bridges are gradually being replaced by iron ones, though even with these the road can still be dangerous in the spring.

CHAPTER THREE

The History of Kashmir to the Muslim Era

As we neared Srinagar on the return journey, which we made by road, the *dunga* having started back through the Nuru Canal whilst we had gone on to Uri, we watched the fluffy white clouds which had rested in a thin layer like a shelf near to the top of the mountains, gradually pile up with the darker ones, then move towards the centre of the valley. The Colonel was correct in his prediction of rain, for with the setting of the sun the first spots came, and it continued on and off—mostly on—for two days.

These precious days were not wasted though, for on the shelves of the houseboat were books which had by then become of much greater interest to me than when I first arrived, their owner having in the meantime inoculated me with the germ of a fascination for Kashmir, and looking through them I decided to concentrate for a while upon its history.

Like many others who have studied it, I was amazed at the amount that is known about the country's past. Unlike any other part of the Indian continent, it possesses an almost complete connected series of written records and chronicles of the past history of the State, including both Kashmir and Jammu.

The Kashmiris generally divide their history into four periods, that of the Hindu Kings, of the Kashmir Muslims, of the Moghuls and of the Pathans. Other more modern writers have divided it into six or even seven periods, adding the Sikh, the Dogra and the pre-Hindu rule. There certainly are records in stone of a history before the Hindu Kings, together with facts which are accepted by the people of the valley.

Originally there were many separate kings ruling over small parts of Kashmir; their kingdoms were known as Katraj. They

fought among themselves and those who had been beaten got together and called in the help of one of the Rajpût kings from Jammu. One of the first of these is said to have been Gonanda the First who reigned about the year 1260 B.C. In records of the pilgrimage to the celebrated cave of Amarnath, there is mention of a King Nara who reigned from 1048 to 1008 B.C. But before the time of either of these kings the learned men of Kashmir tell of that most terrible earthquake which swallowed up the wicked city of Sandimat Nagar—the Sodom of the East; this was followed by a flood which covered the place with the Wular Lake. This they declare took place during the reign of Sundar Sena between 2082 and 2041 B.C. Going yet further back, in records relating to the Takht-i-Sulaiman or Shankaracharya it is claimed by some historians that the original edifice was built by Sandiman, who reigned in Kashmir from 2629 to 2564 B.C., others however declare that it was not built until 200 B.C. and by Jaloka, being rebuilt by the Raja Gopaditya in the sixth century A.D.

In 327 B.C. Alexander the Great invaded Northern India where Buddhism was then the dominating religion of those parts. The great Buddhist monarch Asoka whose kingdom extended from Bengal to the Deccan, to Afghanistan and to the Punjab—a contemporary of Hannibal—conquered Kashmir in about 250 B.C. Himself a convert, he made Buddhism the State religion. It was his son Jaloka, succeeding him in about 200 B.C. who "reverted to the worship of Siva and was a great love of Naga maidens", who also built on the site of the original Takht-i-Sulaiman the first Hindu temple.

Asoka it was who founded the original city of Srinagar at Pandrathan, a village now some three miles up river from the present capital. He established friendly relations with both Egypt and Greece, so that during that period the Kashmir architecture and sculpture bearing evidence of the influence of those countries was introduced. Visiting the village where the old city stood one has to agree that it was well chosen being on higher ground with the great sweep taken by the Jhelum offering a glorious view across the fields, and the mountains behind forming for it a precious protection during the winter months.

In that second century before Christ, the Buddhist Turushka kings, Kuska, Juska and Haniska reigned, during their time it is said that the Nagas "took offence, and destroyed many Buddhists by rolling ice boulders down the mountain sides upon them". Next came many Tartar chiefs invading the valley. After the coming of Christ, at the time of the Roman conquest of England, there is remembered one famous Indo-Scythian king, Kanishka. He it was who convened the Third Council of the Buddhist Church of Kashmir, which drew up the "Greater Vehicle of the Law" but was to gradually disappear with the arrival of the white Hun King in the sixth century. With his coming there started from Central Asia a steady stream of Scythian immigration which was to flow on for nearly three hundred years.

In his time, at a place which is still pointed out at Harwan near the entrance to one of the smaller valleys of the Vale looking down on the mirror-like waters of the Dal Lake there lived a famous Bodhisattva, Nagarjuna, who held unquestioned spiritual power over the land. He was a great alchemist, and his history is interesting in that he was born of wealthy Brahmin parents who had remained childless for many years. With his coming the astrologer foretold that his span of life could only be for seven years. To save themselves the sight of their beloved child dying as had been predicted, the parents sent him on a journey to many places. He arrived in Nalamda, became a monk, learned to contradict the teachings of the Brahmins, and in course of time became the head of the whole of the Buddhist church.

The king who is best remembered by legend during this period was the white Hun King Mirikakula who, it is reliably recorded, ruled about A.D. 525. Of him there are told many stories of his cruelties. The people have passed down through the ages one of these relating to the Pir Panjal Pass in the south-west of the valley where there is a ridge over which he crossed the mountains with his army. In those days armies used elephants extensively; one of these fell down into ravine below and so amused the King by its cries of agony that he ordered that another hundred be forced over the precipice. Another story still told by mothers to those daughters they fear may stray

before they have been married, is that it was found necessary to remove a boulder from the Chandra-Kulya river; the king was told in a dream that only a chaste woman could lift it away. "Many a citizen's wife tried to move the stone, but in vain until Chandravati, wife of a potter, accomplished the task. The king was so infuriated at discovering so many women to be unchaste, that he ordered them to be killed together with their husbands and their brothers, in all three millions."

It is said of him that the people were warned of his coming by the vultures which were always to be seen flying ahead eager to feed upon those who would be slain at his orders—"a man of violent acts and resembling Death".

His own death was dramatic, for he committed suicide.

Hiuen Tsiange, Chinese Buddhist traveller in about A.D. 630, testifies in his chronicles to this famous tyrant leaving few Buddhist monasteries standing—excavated ruins of one at Harwan testifying to their beauty may be seen today. He also makes mention of "the temples of the heretics" and that to escape this terrible oppression, the monks and many others had fled the land to find shelter in Tibet, away from this king who, with extensive dominions in Central Asia, was the uncompromising patron of Brahmins.

One king who ruled about this time has left a lasting memory of his saintlike ways upon the people of Kashmir, who when something unusually fortunate happens, will even today declare that King Vinayaditya's days have come again. In his early days he had been placed under the care of a priest, and when the people came to ask him to take the throne his father had occupied, he agreed providing they accepted the many conditions he laid down, chief among these being that none of his people would ever utter a lie, cheat his fellows, or kill a living being. He built himself a small hut at the foot of Shankaracharya hill, and nearby had two great godowns made into which the landlords of Kashmir were asked to pour, of their own free will, one tenth of that which their lands produced. He appointed his brother to look after one godown and each morning himself distributed the contents of the other to those who were in need of food. He retained an army just sufficient to defend his lands, and did away with all officials' posts. He is said to have

lived a simple life, cultivating a portion of his own land and so earning for himself, also contributing to the godown one-tenth of that which he grew.

The next king of any importance was Good King Gopaditya; a Brahmin; he did much to cleanse the order and advance it for good in the land, founding temples on the Takht and Gupkar.

During the reign of King Tunjina there was a terrible famine in Kashmir; legend tells that it was averted by the miraculous appearance of thousands of pigeons. Then came King Matrgupta, who seems to have been subject to the Kings of Ujjain; he was quiet, gentle and had a "chivalrous courtesy and nobility of character which speaks well for the manners of the age". He submitted to the Raja Pravarasena. Pravarasena II was the king who founded the new capital of Shri Nagar.

We now come to the name of a king best remembered, King Lalitaditya—also known as Muktapida—whose reign was from about A.D. 725 to 750. During his time Kashmir, a country which had suffered serfdom until then, prospered, and instead of defending themselves its men attacked. His army was made up of over six thousand mounted troops and fifty thousand foot; "they went forth to conquer the world", which Kashmiri historians claim he accomplished. He most certainly did force the King of Kanauj and all the other chiefs in the hills of the Punjab to submit, he was victorious over the Turks and the peoples of Central Asia, returning after twelve years to drive the Tibetans from Baltistan.

This illustrious warrior was the son of Raja Pratapaditya, King of Kashmir and born of "the mistress of a fabulously wealthy and magnificent merchant whose wondrous beauty had attracted the attention of the King". Many claim that he was a pure Kashmiri, but this is open to considerable doubt, for his grandfather who founded the dynasty to which he belonged, is said to have sprung from humble origin, though related by marriage to the family which ruled before him: most certainly that particular family was of foreign blood, though it may have been in the land for two, perhaps three, generations.

He brought back from his conquests "men of learning and artisans skilled in many arts and trades" and started to devote

himself to the enhancement of his country and his people, giving much of his time to public works. He built great temples, ornamenting the insides and the outer domes with gold which he had "acquired" in India. It is claimed that it was he who built the mighty temples in Martand, though some say that one of these was built by King Ramadeva (3005-2936 B.C.) and that King Lalitaditya rebuilt it from a ruinous state, adding the colonnade. In all probability he found the mass of stones which had formed the original temple and entirely rebuilt it to the designs of his architects, only using the stone for that purpose. He built another temple and a city at Paraspur, raising there a mighty column; little but great stones now remain, and it is said that those which could be transported with ease were used in the making of the Baramula road. He made canals and drainage systems, thus reclaiming land which had before been useless. His people prospered, though much has doubtless been imagined of his greatness and been passed down as fact; for instance one story that he had built a gigantic cauldron from which one hundred thousand men could be fed each day. He was "just, mighty and magnificent".

But he had another side to his nature; when intoxicated he would issue the cruellest of orders and did not always keep faith or his word. In a fit of drunken madness he ordered that the beautiful city Pravarasena had built should be set on fire, and just as history tells us that Nero fiddled whilst Rome burned, so Lalitaditya stood and rocked with crazy laughter as he watched the city of Shri Nagar go up in flames.

His soldiers were restless though, they had been long used to victory and plunder, and now denied this they started to fight among themselves; there was restlessness in the land and small civil wars broke out. Their King also longed for more conquests and he left for Central Asia. His people besought him to come back, but he died in Turkestan after a reign of nearly forty years.

Before his departure from Kashmir, as though knowing that he would never return, he left for his subjects much wise advice which has been preserved in *The Rajatar*. He started by warning them against civil wars, doubtless having these in mind since he had himself decided again to take his troops abroad because of

them. He cautioned them as to the upkeep in both repairs and provisions of their forts. He laid down his laws for those of his subjects who lived in the mountains, that discipline must be strict, that the cultivators should never be left with more grain than they could consume in one year, and that they should not have more cattle or more ploughs than was absolutely necessary, since this would result in their coveting and taking that ground which belonged to their neighbours. He laid down one order which continued to be obeyed for centuries, that "the cultivators must be repressed and their style of living kept lower than that of the people of the city, otherwise these would suffer". His wisest order came last, although unfortunately it has not been followed since those times, this being that he would not tolerate nepotism among his officers.

During his reign Kashmir rose to such heights as she had never before, nor since has, known. When he came to the throne the country was in a shocking condition as a result of the misrule of his brother, but under him instead of being the attacked, his people became the attackers, instead of being the plundered, they were the plunderers, and when they returned to their homeland and saw its condition as compared with those other countries they had seen, they were ashamed, and under the wise rule of their enlightened king put right the many wrongs, so to become proud of their land.

This reign was followed by a number of either short or weak ones. Lalitaditya's grandson was almost as well known as he in the legends of the land for he also set out to conquer the world; reaching the Ganges he defeated the King of Kanauj, but then had news that his own throne was in peril and had to return to Kashmir to oust the usurper. He is recorded as being "one who encouraged scholars and poets and founded cities". He was followed by "an indolent and profligate prince". After him there came a child in the care of his uncles, who destroyed him when he came of an age to take over, and put another child on the throne. This boy grew into manhood and reigned for nearly forty years because of the quarrels of his uncles, but eventually he also went, again to be replaced by a boy who like all the others was killed off when he began to assert himself.

The reign of King Avantivarman commenced in A.D. 855. During the hundred and twenty years from the time of Lalitaditya the country had suffered economically from misrule. It was during this king's rule that the valley was drained of much of the water which inundated the lands, the engineer sage Suyya deepening the bed of the river Jhelum and clearing a passage for the waters to escape at Suyyapore—a town named after him but now known as Sopore. Avantivarman founded the city of Aventipore, now a squalid village on the banks of the Jhelum half way between Srinagar and Islamabad and standing among massive ruins of bygone buildings, probably the most imposing of ancient Kashmir architecture, not unlike that at Martand, but enriched with elaborate carvings. The king concentrated upon the recovery of his own land and there is no record of his leaving its frontiers to conquer others.

He was followed by his son, Camkaravarman, in the year A.D. 883. The new king was a great conqueror who after establishing his rights to the throne over his cousin, "was able to set out with nine hundred thousand foot, three hundred elephants, and one hundred thousand horse". Truly an amazing number if correct, but where did they come from—were they hired from the adjoining lands? There is little doubt that many came from Poonch and the hills. He is now only remembered by the temple at Pattan—then called Sankarapura. His recorded character is that of "an avaricious tyrant, a gambler and debauchee". Yet the two temples were dedicated to Mahadeva by him in conjunction with his queen Sugandha.

There then followed a long period of struggles between kings, their brothers, uncles, cousins and others for power. Small kingdoms were set up, boy kings "ruled". The one who immediately followed Camkaravarman was a child; his mother although Regent, was under the influence of the minister who was her paramour. Two years after his accession the boy king was murdered by the minister. The boy who succeeded him lived but a few days. The Regent mother then cast her minister aside and herself ruled the country for two or three years. The military chiefs overruled her councils though: she stood firm, they revolted, the Queen was captured and executed, and the military placed a king of their own choosing on the throne

supporting him with unscrupulous ministers. This could not last for long and after two years the king lost his throne to a child king; another revolution, and still another king of whom it is said he could not bribe his soldiers sufficiently, so he also went.

A new phase then commenced in the history of Kashmir. The feudal landlords—many little less than minor kings—who had suffered much because of this friction in Srinagar brought about by the years of power of the military party, marched with their small armies against the city. They defeated the military army, cast out the minister and restored the old royal line by placing on the throne one who was the legitimate king. He however "showed to those who had put him in power, little gratitude for what they had done for him, and abandoned himself to vile cruelties and excesses, until the feudal landlords being unable to withstand more, murdered him at night as he lay within the arms of one of his many low-caste queens".

The feudal lords were still to be unfortunate, for his successor was if anything worse; his cruelties and sensual excesses, encouraged by a minister who was the whole time scheming to get the throne for himself, being those of a madman. Saturated by his minister with the belief that his relations were intending to wrest the throne from him, he set about destroying them, some he murdered, others he cast into pits and starved to death—a favourite method of extermination in those days. He only lived for two years though and his successor fled after taking his place but a few days.

The Military Chief endeavoured to place himself on the throne, and realizing how powerful were the Brahmins in the land, to gain their favours and confidence, he placed his election in the hands of an assembly formed by them. To his astonishment they selected a king from among themselves, one who ruled with great wisdom for nine years, during which time the country started to settle down to peace once more. It was not to be for long though, for at his death the minister who considered he had been usurped nine years before, forced his way into the Royal Palace, slaughtered the new king and flung the body into the River Jhelum. He ruled for a little over one year then "his

body swelled as large as his head had become" and he died—doubtless of dropsy...

Now comes an interesting period, for he was followed by a boy king, Kashemagupta, "who was grossly sensual and addicted to all of the very many vices then known and practised". He married Princess Didda of the house of Poonch, one who was a granddaughter of a famous King Bhima of the Kabul Shahi dynasty, a woman of great power of character, so that even during her sybaritic husband's reign her influence on the affairs of State was felt.

When her husband died in A.D. 958 her minor son Abhimanyu succeeded him, she being of course his guardian with full royal powers; the greater part of these she had in fact assumed during the lifetime of her dissolute husband. She was as ruthless as any of the most wicked of kings that had ever ruled Kashmir. Some historians suggest that "she was concerned in the early death of her son". She "put down all rivals, executing all captured rebels and exterminating their families to the last babe". She also, either by open murder or questionable means, caused the deaths of two if not three of her grandsons. She then "fell in love with a letter-carrier, one who began his life in Lohara as a peasant herdsman"—in all probability he would be referred to as a court courier in these days—and appointed him as her minister. He dominated her for the whole of her reign, was valiant, building up the army to such a standard of quality that when the great conqueror Mahmud Ghazvani, who was forcing Mohammedanism on India, tried to invade Kashmir, he had to return a disappointed and wiser man. She in turn was a cunning and far-seeing diplomat and it seems that during the years that she held the throne the land did not drop back.

Having exterminated her sons and heirs, she had to adopt one and he, her nephew Samgramaraja, followed her to murder the letter-carrier minister together with his son. Following this there seem to be masses of short reigns, sons being killed off by mothers, murders and suicides, until King Harasa came to the throne in 1089, ruling for twelve years. He was outstanding among the latter Hindu Kings of Kashmir, being brave, able and versatile, a lover of the arts and of music, but "cruelty and

kind-heartedness, cunning and want of thought, displayed themselves in turn in his chequered life". His court was magnificent; he encouraged wise men, musicians and poets. Like so many that had gone before him, fearing intrigue among those of his family, he had them all murdered including his half-brother and the nephews by him. He is said to have spent so recklessly on his army and on self-indulgence that his treasury became empty, and he resorted to a ruthless plundering of the temples, not even sparing the golden images and idols. In addition he imposed still further taxation upon the people. A plague invaded the land. Taking advantage of the sickness of the people and the soldiers, robbers invaded everywhere; then there came a terrible flood which brought about a famine, with the result that the starved and unhappy peoples rose against their king and slew him. It is said that "his head was cut off and then burned after all had gazed upon it, whilst his body was cremated naked, as would be that of a beggar, by a compassionate wood-dealer".

His successor, King Ucchala, inherited an empty treasury, "his ministers and petty chieftains acting like highwaymen", and when he came to power through the latter, it was they who really ruled the country whilst his younger "brother wished a civil war in the kingdom". Realizing that he was quite alone and could trust none, the king set one against the other by fermenting jealousy and suspicion among them. He removed the leaders by either driving them over the frontiers or murdering them, and then forced those who remained in small pockets over the country, to submit, leaving them without arms. He came to the conclusion that the Kayasthas officers were the cause of many of the deaths of his subjects, they being as destructive as "spasmodic cholera, colic, and the disease which ends in sudden death", so that he systematically persecuted them, but the poor administration he installed in their place weakened his powers. So far as his subjects were concerned he was capable and liberal, but firm. Like so many before him, his end, which came after ten years of rule, was violent. The city-prefect together with his brothers entered the palace by night; they came upon him proceeding to the seraglio together with a few followers, and fell upon him. Although "he fought with desperate bravery he

was soon overpowered by his many assailants and cruelly murdered".

He was followed by a king who reigned for hardly a day, another, his half-brother, for a few months, his brother making him a prisoner and reigning in his stead for eight years, and years of internal troubles and rebellions brought about by the landlords. Frantically he did his best to subdue those who stood against him, "imprisoning his Minister together with the Minister's three sons, finally ordering them to be strangled". From records he seems to have been possessed of a satanic mind, practising upon those landlords he held as hostages the most diabolical cruelties. Finally they rose in such strength against him that he was forced to flee to Poonch, whilst a pretender held his throne for about a year, during which time the poor wretched people of the land were at the mercy of bands led by those who were endeavouring to take the throne. Then the king returned and emulating so many who had gone before him, set the feudal landlords one against the other and held the throne for a further five years, after which he went the way of all others and "was done to death".

So it went on for two more centuries with the landlords holding sway, themselves petty kings and paying no attention to the king in Srinagar. Some of these kings lasted for many years, others few, and gradually the Hindu kingdom disintegrated.

Sir Francis Younghusband, K.C.I.E., who was the British Resident in Srinagar at the beginning of this, the twentieth century, commenting on the slaughter of and by kings during the periods so far traced in these pages, which are based on the writings of Kalhana Pandit who lived in those times, said, "I have myself seen a precise counterpart of it in independent states on this very frontier. When I visited Hunza in 1889 the then chief, now in exile, had murdered his father, poisoned his mother, and thrown his two brothers over a precipice. The Chief of Chitral, when I was there in 1893, was one of only four survivors of seventeen brothers who were living when their father died, and he himself was subsequently murdered by one of his three surviving brothers—a brother whom he had frequently asked my permission to murder, on the ground that if

he did not murder the brother, the brother would murder him. In Chitral there was also the same struggle with 'nobles' as is recorded of Kashmir, and murders of 'nobles' were horribly frequent".

Canon C. E. Tyndale-Biscoe, who spent the greater part of his life in Kashmir as headmaster of the Church Missionary Society Boys School, tells of an incident in 1890. He was writing of the Raja of Hunza one of whose sons had become a pupil in his school. The boy was boasting to his headmaster of his father's bravery, and to give proof of it declared, "My father took his brother, my uncle, out hawking; later on they stopped for food and when they had finished and were mounting their horses, my uncle came forward to hold my father's stirrup, but my father said, 'No, you mount first', and insisted on holding the stirrup of my uncle to mount. Then as my uncle was lifting his other leg over the saddle, my father up with his gun and shot my uncle, his brother, in the back, and killed him dead! Oh my father is a brave man, but not only because of this incident. I will tell you another." (His eyes were then sparkling with pride over his father's bravery.) "My father had an old mother, my grandmother, a very old woman, sahib, who had no teeth. Well, my father went into the Zenana to see his old mother. She was sitting on the floor and my father wished her good morning and then asked her to look out of the window, and as his old mother turned to look out, my father up with his gun and shot her in the back and killed her dead ! But you see my grandmother was only an old woman and had no teeth, sahib. Oh my father is a very brave man."

Tyndale-Biscoe mentions that "my father", the Raja of Hunza was brought prisoner to Srinagar and lodged in Hari Parbat fort for seven years, but he does not say if it was for these hideous crimes of which his son was so proud.

It is recorded that in 1286 when Raja Simha Deva became king "Kashmir was a country of drunkards, gamblers and fornicators". During the reign of this king Kashmir was invaded by the Tartar Zulkadar Khan and the king fled to Kishtwar, leaving the invader to set Srinagar on fire, take such of the people as he chose for slaves and slaughter as many others as his troops could lay hands on. After occupying the country

for eight months, with no workers on the land, he found food-getting short and tried to leave the valley by way of that pass in the south which goes through the Kuli Narawao Valley, but it was during the winter months and snow overtook them; they were less fortunate than was Napoleon on his retreat from Moscow, and all perished.

Ram Chand, King Simha Deva's Commander-in-Chief had not deserted Kashmir though, and he now moved down towards Srinagar, driving out the Gaddis who had moved in from Kishtwar, the place to which his king had escaped. Among Ram Chand's followers were two men, one was Shah Misra from Swat, the other Rainchan Shah, son of the King of Tibet. Rainchan Shah quarrelled with Ram Chand, just as he had done with his father, and killed him with the help of those followers he had brought with him from his father's kingdom. He then proceeded to marry the murdered man's daughter, Kuta Rani, and proclaimed himself King in the year A.D. 1320.

He wished to become a Hindu, but the Brahmins refused to accept him into their faith. Then there came from Arabia one Bulbul Shah and after seeing him at his prayers and listening to him preaching, the King decided that he would embrace Islam, doing so he took the name of Sadr-ul-din and started pulling down temples, destroying manuscripts and killing Hindus. It was he who built the great Jama Masjid mosque in Srinagar. After a reign of less than three years, this first of the Muslim kings died; unusual though it was, his death was not violent.

Udayanadeva, brother of King Simha Deva, now arrived and married Rainchan Shah's widow, Kuta Rani. At this period in history Urwan, a Turk, invaded Kashmir, and just as his brother had done before him Udayanadeva fled the valley, leaving his wife to collect together an army which she sent out under the command of Shah Mirza against Urwan. Urwan was defeated, and the king then returned to rule for a further fifteen years.

Upon his death in A.D. 1332, Kuta Rani stepped on to the throne, but only remained there for fifty days; then Shah Mirza declared himself to be king. No doubt with a view to consolidating his position, he proposed marriage to Kuta Rani—already twice widowed. Realizing that she was powerless to do

other than accept, after temporising for some time, she consented, and the Hindus proudly tell how as the king entered the bridal chamber, rather than submit to his embraces, "she stabbed herself to death with a bejewelled golden dagger".

So with royal dignity passed the last of Hindu rulers. Their queens had been outstanding; from among them the names of eighteen have been remembered.

CHAPTER FOUR

From Hindu to Present Times

THE Muslim era had begun.

In 1389 there came to the throne Sultan Sikandar. He must have been about eight years of age on his accession, and his mother Haura—by some known as Sura Begum—a woman of great strength of character, stopped at nothing to protect him during her twelve years of regency; she even had her daughter and her son-in-law put to death when she came to hear that they were preparing to lead a rebellion against the young king.

With his name is usually hyphenated But-Shikast or Iconoclast, meaning "The idol breaker". He was a sadistic religious fanatic resolved to obliterate every sign of Hinduism from his country. He destroyed as many as he was able of the beautiful temples which had been built by his predecessors, using the stones where he could in the making of mosques. It is said that for one whole year hundreds of men were employed in the destruction of the grand temples at Martand; those massive stones which they were unable to remove they defaced. All the learned books of the Hindus he ordered to be sunk in the Dal Lake. Then he turned to the people, offering them conversion, death or exile. Many fled, many permitted themselves to be converted and thousands were killed; of the latter it is said that they "burned seven maunds of the sacred threads", worn at all times round the necks "of the murdered Brahmins". His was known as the "gloomy reign", the drinking of wine, gambling and even music not being permitted in the land. His persecution of the Hindus was terrible and his treatment of the people made them so miserable that they prayed for deliverance from his rule, but it went on for twenty-three years.

In 1420 he was succeeded by Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din a youth of seventeen years of age, whose reign is to this day remembered as the happiest for the people of Kashmir. This king's private life was a model to his subjects; "he was virtuous, self-controlled and frugal". His personal and household expenses he paid out of the proceeds of a copper mine he had discovered; he released all those who had been imprisoned by the kings who had gone before him; he controlled the middle man's profits. He made his brother his Chief Minister, entrusting him with the details of the Government whilst he turned his own attention to greater problems, encouraging the cultivators, building bridges and canals, one of these being the Nulla Mar, then spanned by seven bridges, which runs between the city and the Dal Lake. He built a most magnificent palace supplied with cool running waters from the Sind River. It was twelve stories high, each floor having fifty rooms, and in each of these five hundred men could be seated. But like so many of the palaces and houses built by the Muslims, wood was used for its construction, so that no sign of it remains. An old Mullah—one of the few learned ones I have met there—told me that "the Muslims always built their mosques in the valley of wood because it was warmer for the faithful to worship there, as they should do no less than five times a day, whilst the Hindu can easily put up with a cold stone temple, since they pray but once a day and the prayer lasts for but a few minutes".

As ruler Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din made every endeavour to revive Hindu learning, repairing the temples—among them the Takht-i-Sulaiman—remitting the heavy poll-tax which his predecessor had inflicted on those who had been brave enough to remain in the valley, and went so far to encourage those who had fled to return by offering them grants of land. His tolerance of the Brahmins was amazing for a Muslim. To this day many Brahmins will explain this by a centuries-old story which they truly believe, this being that just after he came to the throne he was taken sick and was at the point of death when a Hindu Yogi to whom he had once been kind, came forward and offered to exchange his own soul for that of the dying young king; the one condition he made was that his body should be put in a safe place and there preserved. The king accepted the Yogi's soul,

but his brother, the Chief Minister, cremated the body, and from that day the real king was the Hindu ascetic and not Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din.

Another story, and one which is probably true, is that the young king had been suffering for many months from a terrible and painful boil which none of the royal physicians could cure. One Shri Bhatta came forward and offered to remove it painlessly with some golden ointment, which he did. The delighted king had Shri Bhatta brought to him and requested him to ask for himself any royal favour he wished, but instead he asked that the persecuted Brahmins might be permitted to live in peace in the valley. From that day the king at times showed for those people more consideration than he did for his Muslim subjects and in consequence was known by the Hindus as Badshah, meaning the Great Monarch.

Until that time the official language of the country under the Hindu kings had been Sanskrit. It was he who brought the Persian script into the country. A patron of letters and the fine arts, within his court at all times were to be found writers, poets, musicians and singers, many of whom had travelled far to meet him. Into Kashmir he introduced paper making, silk production and weaving; from the soft wools imported from Ladakh, the shawls for which Kashmir became famous, and also papier mâché work. He was known to be a great lover of the field sports.

Even then he had in his blood the desire for conquest, and going out to war, added Tibet and part of the Punjab to his kingdom. In Kashmir he had trouble with the Chaks, a tribe which he eventually drove back into the Dard's country after capturing Pandu Chak their leader whom he had flogged to death; then repenting, he took Hussain Chak, the dead man's son, into his favour.

At the age of sixty-nine Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din died. He left behind a name revered by all Kashmiris, whether Hindu or Muslim, always being remembered as a just, generous and enlightened prince, one who within the space of fifty years had done his best to put right the wrongs committed by those who had sat on the throne for many centuries before him. During his reign the Vale of Kashmir was indeed "The happy valley".

As so often happens, the son of this great king was a weakling and a drunkard. In 1532 Mirza Haider with an army of Turks—or Moghuls—invaded Kashmir from the north, and held it for some years. The next we read is of the Chaks attacking the country from the north. Little is known of these people, except that they were not of Kashmir blood and the only traces now to be found of them are in the northern parts of the state. In the space of thirty-three years from 1554, eight of them ruled. They are said to have been brave men, enormous in stature, unscrupulous and brutally cruel; gradually reducing the country to the poor state it had been in less than a hundred years before.

Yusaf Khan who came to the throne in 1580 "married a woman of the peasant classes and forgetting all else, gave himself up to pleasure". He is credited with having discovered the charms of Gulmarg. He quarrelled with his minister who, since he was holding all the power, turned the king out of the country. Yusaf Khan's son, Yakub Khan, was made of a different mettle though, and when in 1582 Akbar the Great made his first attack on the country, it was he who got together an army of the Bombas and Kukas, men who lived in the Jhelum Valley, and with the help of heavy rains and the invaders' lack of food, defeated them, inflicting heavy losses on the Moghuls. Then the story twists, for the elated victorious Commander-in-Chief returned to the valley, there to persecute not only the Hindus, but also to ill-treat the Sunni Muslims, so that they appealed to Akbar to release them. He listened to their plea, promised them a return of religious tolerance as well as the complete abolition of the slave trade and in 1585 dispatched a force under Mizra Kasim. Yakub Khan again went forward to meet him, but with a disaffected army behind him, many of whom deserted him and joined the Moghul forces. Yakub Khan was forced to retreat. The invaders reached Srinagar the following year, but were once again attacked by Yakub Khan who had taken up a position on the Takht-i-Sulaiman, while forces from the south under Shamsi Chak also attacked them. At times the invaders were almost defeated, but reinforcements came in time and a year later the period of the Sultans of Kashmir ended, and that of the Moghul Emperors commenced, with Akbar, a contem-

porary of Queen Elizabeth I, incorporating Kashmir into his empire, at the same time bringing peace to the valley. It was to remain a dependency of the Moghul Emperors for nearly two hundred years.

Akbar visited Kashmir three times. The first occasion was upon his taking over the throne. Among his court then was his finance minister Todar Mal, who from his camp at Patan settled the amount of revenue to be paid by the people. It is said that when he was about to decide upon those taxes to be levied on the inhabitants of Patan itself, the beautiful daughter of a big landlord in that district came to his tent, and in the excitement of the resultant affair he forgot to complete the document. That part of the country had therefore got her to thank for its being omitted from the records and consequent taxation.

During his third visit, Akbar rebuilt the fort on the hill of Hari Parbat and had a wall made around it, paying liberal wages to the workers in the hopes of tempting back those who had fled the country. It is said that in so doing he employed thirty thousand carriers and coolies. But he had his empire to rule from Delhi and could spend little time in Kashmir; in spite of this he was such a ruler that he saw to it that those he left in control faithfully carried out his orders and the people were happy under them.

Akbar's successor was Jehangir who loved Kashmir best of all the countries he ruled. He has come down in history as the great garden maker, among those most famous of his gardens in Kashmir to this day being Shalimar, Nasim and Nishat Baghs with wonderful pavilions in each, all beautifully terraced with cool water spurting from fountains, flowing over cascades and shimmering over marble slopes. He also had planted the now magnificent, massive chinar trees seen throughout the valley. It is interesting to find him writing in his autobiography that he also married a Kashmiri girl, the daughter of a prince of Kashmir, by whom he had a daughter who died when she was but a year old. It was he who in 1627 whilst being carried on his death-bed out of Kashmir and back to Delhi, there to die, was asked if there was anything he wanted. His reply the people of the land have always cherished—"Only Kashmir!"

His son Shah Jahan not only continued his work of building gardens, but also maintained the liberal policy his father had adopted towards his subjects. During this Moghul period it is said that seven hundred and seventy-seven gardens were laid out in the vicinity of the Dal Lake; the roses and bed-musk produced one hundred thousand rupees a year for the State. Some idea of what was then taxed may be gauged from a note that Zaffar Khan, one of the Emperor's subahs, "reduced the pole-tax on boatmen and the taxes on sheep; he also put down the practice of seizing the best fruits of the land and the wood for the use of the officials, for this had caused the people to cut down their trees". Itikad Khan, another of the subahs, although a cruel ruler, has to his credit the final putting down of the Chaks.

The Emperor Shah Jehan's son Aurangzeb is remembered for his terrible early persecution of the Brahmins in spite of his only visiting the valley once after he came to the throne. He is referred to in the chronicles as "The Puritanical Moghul monarch", and "his name is one execrated by the Brahmins of Kashmir", whilst "his fierce zeal against the unbelievers made itself felt in Kashmir". Yet the traveller Bernier, whose writings are frequently quoted, and who passed through the country during that king's reign, refers to the people's wit, intelligence and ingenuity, declaring that "in poetry and sciences they are not inferior to the Persians". He calls Kashmir "the terrestrial paradise of the Indies", talking about the abundance of flowers, fruits and crops.

The Emperor Aurangzeb's one visit came about after he had suffered a serious illness in 1664 and his journey to the Valley of Kashmir was made in order to restore his health. Dr. Bernier arrived there in 1665 and in his book describes this royal visit; later he attended Aurangzeb professionally. The Emperor's journey was not a very happy one for " his passage up the Chenab river was a state of utter confusion and chaos. Then on crossing over the Pir Panjal Pass, one of the many elephants walking head to tail and carrying the ladies of the Court, slipped back, with the result that a dozen or more behind were forced over the precipice, killing some of the women and injuring many of the men, some of the animals rolling to the bottom of

the ravine". Here in the valley Aurangzeb remained until the heat of the plains had gone, then he returned to Delhi.

The Moghul empire began to fall into a state of decay, and with its disintegration the governors made themselves into petty kings, so that we read that by 1750 "the office of subah of Kashmir seems to have become hereditary and almost independent of Delhi".

From 1753 Kashmir came under the rule of the Pathans, and from then on until 1819 no less than twenty-eight Shahani Durani governed the country. The oppression of the Hindus in particular during that time was unparaleled in the history of Kashmir. It has been described by Lawrence as a period of "brutal tyranny, unrelieved by good works, chivalry or honour", whilst Younghusband says of the governors, "they thought no more of cutting off heads than plucking a flower". Instead of Delhi, Kabul now became the capital from which Kashmir was ruled, but the governors having no idea as to how long they would be permitted to remain in that enviable office, wrung from the country as much as they could before being recalled. It is recorded that one "Azim-Khan made for himself a fortune of two crores* of rupees in six years".

With the Moghul rulers it had been a case of conversion to Islam, death, or flee the country, when Asad Khan ruled, it was conversion or death. The poor wretched pundits who refused conversion to Islam were made to stand with a pitcher filled with ordure upon their heads while the Muslims pelted it with stones for their amusement. When the pitcher broke the Hindu was blinded by the filth which burst from it. After this, just as we now hear of men being forced to dig their own graves, so then they were caused to make large grass matting bags, then, tied two facing each other, they were pressed into the bags, taken out in boats on to the Dal Lake and dumped alive over the side. That part of the lake is now known as "Bat Mazar"—the graveyard of the Hindus.

Only one of these rulers could be considered better than the others. He was Amir Khan Jawan Sher who built the Amiran Kadal bridge, now known as the seventh bridge, and also constructed the original Shergarhi Palace, used since that time by

* A crore is ten millions.

all the rulers except the last Maharaja. Yet in spite of this, on hearing of the Kashmiris' admiration of the gardens made by the Moghuls on the Dal Lake, he had them destroyed—as many as he was able.

The pundits who were permitted to remain in the land—and some such as Pundit Nath Ram Tikoo and Pundit Zairam Bhan, because of their learning, were accepted into the Afghan Court —were forced to grow beards, were not permitted to wear either turbans or shoes, whilst the red or saffron "tika" mark on the forehead was forbidden. In these days the Kashmiri pundit wears a gigantic turban and an exaggerated "tika" mark: it is said that this is to remind them at all times of the terrible tyranny of the Pathan rulers.

Mir Hazar was a ruler who drowned both Shias and Brahmins in the lake, using leather sacks for the purpose, thus sending the Hindus to their deaths in a bag made of skin—to them the cow is sacred and their religion does not permit the handling or wearing of leather. Atta Mubaman Khan's agent was Koshib, an ugly old woman who was resolved to leave no virgin girls for marriage to the Hindus. Rather than allow their daughters to be outraged by the Muslims, their mothers cut off their hair—a Kashmiri woman's glory, and even sliced off their noses.

At that time any Muslim who happened to meet a pundit or a Hindu boy on the road would jump on his back, making him give him a ride or forcing him to the ground shouting, "Buta chukta khosa Dita", meaning in Kashmiri, "You are a Brahmin and I will mount you".

Then Fettah Khan Barakzi offered eight lacs of rupees per year to Ranjit Singh, leader of a new warrior sect in the Punjab who had gained for himself the title of "The Lion of the Punjab", for him to attack Kashmir. The Sikh army first advanced by way of the Pir Panjal in 1814, with Ranjit Singh watching operations from Poonch. A story was set abroad by the Raja of Rajauri that the van of the attacking army had been cut off and routed at Hipur by Muhamad Azim; as a result of this the whole of the Sikh army was withdrawn. The "victorious" General returned to Srinagar to give vent to his delight by further unspeakable tortures of the Brahmins, knowing through his spies that it was they who were responsible for this attack. Then

a diplomatic courier by name Pundit Birbal Dhar, accompanied by his son Rajkak managed to get through to Lahore, where he begged Ranjit Singh once again to attack Kashmir, promising him this time what assistance it was possible to give from within the country. The spies of Muhamad Azim were good, and hearing through them of this journey and its purpose, he sent for the wives of the two men; Birbal Dhar's wife committed suicide, but the young wife of Rajkak was made a Muslim and sent away to Kabul. Referring to her, Lawrence in 1895 wrote, "where she was living until quite recently".

Muhamad Azim hearing of the might and power of the army which was to attack, fled to Kabul and left his brother Jabar Khan as governor. In 1819 Ranjit Singh's great general Misr Diwan Chand, together with Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu, defeated the new governor who put up little defence, and then entered Shupiyon, later planting the Sikh flag on the topmost point of Hari Parbat, the fort in Srinagar built by Akbar.

The Sikh rule was much the same as had been that of the others; they appointed a Governor from Lahore, and during the twenty-seven years of the Sikh period, ten governors held the important post. The poor wretched people were taxed even more heavily, and having been converted from Hinduism to Mohammedanism they were again persecuted as such, the Sikhs being an offshoot of the Hindus.

Taxation was crushing, with cultivators who had previously to give a half of their corn to the State, now having to contribute three-quarters. Shawls were taxed twenty-six per cent of their estimated value; in addition to this there was an import duty levied on the wool from which they were made. Every trade and profession was taxed from butchers to scavengers and public notaries to prostitutes, whilst the Kotwal—the Chief Justice—had to pay thirty thousand rupees a year for his appointment, being left to reimburse himself as best he could—one can imagine how.

In addition to this the dreaded "beggar" system of unpaid forced labour, which was nothing less than slave hunting, was re-introduced into the country, the State armed forces rounding up all the able-bodied men and sending them away for long

periods to distant places to labour as coolies—often never to return. The fields were tended by the old men and old women as best they could. The younger women hid themselves under burqas—long white gowns which cover them from the crown of their heads to their feet whilst the boys suffered the same fate as their brothers had done hundreds of years before in Corinth.

Again thousands fled the country: this time they were the Muslims.

Moorcroft in his book written after a visit to Kashmir at that time talks of the half-deserted villages, the people practically naked, miserably emaciated and presenting a ghastly picture of poverty and starvation. "The Sikhs look upon the Kashmirians as little better than cattle", he said. If a Sikh murdered a native he was fined a mere sixteen or twenty rupees; of this but four rupees would be paid to the victim's family if he had been a Hindu and two rupees if he had been a Muslim.

Even then the wit in the Kashmiri was not stifled and showed itself on many occasions. He is fond of nicknames, and in 1825 Kirpa Ram was made governor; of him it is written that he was "a mild self-indulgent man who was fond of boating and boat women". The nickname he earned for himself was Kirpa Shroin, the word tied to his name meaning the sound of the dip of the boat paddle.

1827 saw a severe earthquake in the valley. The city of Srinagar was almost destroyed. Cholera followed in its wake.

On the day in which one ruler, Kharak Singh, died, his son was killed by being crushed to death "by the fall of a piece of wall". The Rani Chand Kaur, mother of the boy, suspecting Sher Singh to be responsible for this, started plotting against him, but "her own slave-girls, with whom Sher Singh held favour, crushed in the head of their mistress at a time when she was enjoying her siesta".

In the time of Sher Singh—the supposed son of Ranjit Singh—a most terrible famine swept the country, one which was felt even in the city. Thousands fled into the Punjab from the State. So long and severe was it that even to the ordinary man in the street this famine is still a landmark in the history of his country.

In 1833 came Colonel Main Singh, an enlightened ruler and

the one Sikh governor who is remembered for the relief he gave to the valley. He imported seed grain and fowls in an effort to replenish the villages; he remitted the heavy tax on marriages, reduced the tax on produce to fifty per cent, that which it had been before the Sikhs came, and with imprisonment and heavy fines punished those who cheated by giving bad measure or making excessive middleman's profits, but upon the death of Ranjit Singh, the soldiers stationed in Kashmir mutinied, rose against this Governor and slaughtered him.

Anarchy prevailed in the Punjab. Weak, perverted and unbalanced successors endeavoured to make some semblance of rule out of the chaos there, but the short-lived Sikh Empire was crumbling. Ranjit Singh's immediate successor died of excess, and Sher Singh, the once Governor of Kashmir, marched on Lahore and seized the government; that was in 1841. The Sikh soldiers paid no attention to the orders of their ruler or to Dhyan Singh—Gulab Singh's brother—his minister, they were completely controlled by their army committees. The minister was in a plot in which a man from Amritsar shot the ruler whilst he was reviewing his troops; then the minister was himself murdered by a Sikh chieftain.

And while Maharaja Sher Singh was being assassinated, his son and heir, a lad of but twelve years, was murdered at the orders of his own uncle, being "cruelly cut to pieces with sabres at the moment when he was occupied with his Brahmins in prayer after giving alms to the poor", being a Sancrat Day. And one of those curious little notes one comes across when searching the pages of history, "With the body of Dhyan Singh thirteen wives and female slaves were burnt".

Dhulip Singh, a child of five years was next put on the throne. Hari Singh, nephew of Gulab Singh, became his minister, tried to control the army, failed, fled, was captured and killed, his head being brought back in triumph to Lahore.

Then the power was grabbed jointly by the brother of the child Dhulip Singh's mother and one Lal Singh, her Brahmin paramour. They increased the soldiers' pay, and to give them something to do, set them against Gulab Singh at Jammu; victorious, they brought him to Lahore and made him pay ten million rupees.

Another son of Ranjit Singh next rose against them, but he failed and was murdered by the regent uncle of the child Dhulip Singh; this uncle was later himself murdered. The mother, together with Lal Singh and Tej Singh the army Commander-in-Chief, next took over the government, and to keep the army busy, for it was much feared by the throne, ordered it to advance into British territory.

During November 1845 a Sikh army of sixty thousand with one hundred and fifty guns crossed the frontier, and in a "bloody and indecisive battle fought at Mudki" in December against some ten thousand British and British-Indian troops in which the Governor-General, Lord Hardinge, took part, five of his aides-de-camp were killed and four wounded. The British held the invaders and in the January of 1846 the battle of Aliwal was fought. The government at Lahore collapsed, Lal Singh was deposed, and Gulab Singh was invited from Jammu to negotiate with the Governor-General, though it was not until February that it was possible for him to arrive at a settlement, the Sikh army still making a stand and not to be thoroughly defeated until the 10th of February at Sobraon. The British troops then marched into Lahore, the Sikh Government submitted, and on the 9th of March, the Treaty of Lahore was concluded. On the 16th of March there came the Treaty of Amritsar by which Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir.

As Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu, he was one of the two Generals who in 1819 helped to add Kashmir to the Sikh Empire. Now leading an army of but five thousand men, he advanced on Srinagar and quelled the mutiny. Having done so, he left Shek Ghulam Muhiuddin there as Governor and returned to the Punjab, but a year later trouble again broke out in the Jhelum Valley; this time it was brought about by the Bombas, a brave but troublesome tribe which claims descent from the Turks. Their leader, Sultan Zabardast Khan had been caught and flung into prison in Srinagar. In revenge, the Bombas under Sher Ahmad exterminated seven thousand men of the Sikh army at Kahori, marched against Kashmir and defeated a force of twelve thousand men under the command of the governor's son Imamuddin at Shilham. The snow fell and

the remaining Sikhs were forced to retreat. Zabardast Khan was released, but the governor remained, and during the following year opened the Jama Masjid, the mosque which had been closed since the Sikhs came into power twenty-four years previously.

Gulab Singh remained as the virtual master of the valley although it belonged to the Sikh rulers in Lahore, and so it came about that on the 16th of March, 1846, Kashmir and all the mountainous country east of the river Indus and west of the river Ravi which had been ceded to the British Government by the Sikhs by way of idemnity, was made over to the Maharaja "Gulab Singh and the heirs male of his body" in exchange for three-quarters of a million pounds sterling paid down, and an annual tribute of one horse, twelve goats and six pairs of shawls.

Although appointed by Gulab Singh, Imamuddin, who had succeeded his father as Governor, would not now give up power. Allying himself with Sher Ahmad and his Bombas, they defended Srinagar against the troops sent to take it over, and invested the Hari Parbat fort for forty days. Maharaja Gulab Singh's forces were defeated; Lakap Rai, his representative whom he had sent as the new governor, was killed, while the elated Bombas and Kukas then turned on the people, raiding the valley and plundering the city. Eventually British forces moved into Jammu territory and the defenders surrendered.

The Maharaja Gulab Sing was a Dogra Rajput, in other words a Rajput living in the Dogra country, which is that hilly country running down from the range of mountains which bound Kashmir on the south and the plains of the Punjab.

Born in 1788, he could trace his ancestors back for many generations. They had always been warriors. His great-grandfather, Sarup Singh, was one of the brothers of Ranjit Dev, a ruler who had built up in Jammu a fairly stable government after years of chaos, and whose descendants ruled it until 1809 when they were deposed. At the age of twenty, his branch of the family having fallen on hard times, Gulab Singh was earning the handsome pay of three rupees a month and his rations by

military employment under the Killadar of Mungla, a fort to the west of Jhelum. He became discontented though, returned to Jammu, and in 1807, when the Sikhs attacked that city, distinguished himself and "was spoken well of to the Maharaja Ranjit Singh". Then in 1811, together with his brother Dhyan, a lad of about fifteen years of age, borrowing the money to buy horses, they went to Lahore and were presented to the Maharaja. "Well impressed by their courtly behaviour and handsome features, the Maharaja ordered them to be in personal attendance on him on Rs. 90 per month." After the death of their father they brought up family reinforcements and their twelve-year-old brother Suchetu joined them; he was "graceful and handsome, and at once wormed his way into the Maharaja's regard and confidence", "his engaging qualities met with particular favour from the Maharaja, who became so fond of him that he would never allow him to be absent from his presence". "It was indeed the good looks of the three Dogra brothers" says Dr. Sufi in his *Kashmir* "that evoked an immediate response from Ranjit Singh who had a special eye for personal beauty". Smythe in his *Reigning Family of Lahore* says that when Gulab Singh left his brothers to return to Jammu, they were "in high favour and close intimacy with their royal master, and well instructed as to the use they were to make of their opportunities for the aggrandizement of the family".

Gulab Singh's is truly the story of a soldier of fortune who stopped at absolutely nothing to achieve his objective—the throne of Kashmir and Jammu.

When Ranjit Singh attacked Jammu, Gulab Singh and his brothers served under him; their reward came when Jammu had been absorbed into the Sikh Empire, then Gulab Singh was made the Raja of Jammu, his brother Dhyan the Raja of Poonch and the other brother the Raja of Ramnagar. During the following years Gulab Singh conquered both Ladakh and Baltistan as well as invading Tibet. And when Ranjit Singh died, in addition to the power Gulab Singh already had in Jammu, Ladakh and Baltistan, he also "had a commanding influence in Kashmir".

So it was that he, who is remembered in history for his oppression and avarice, founded the new dynasty, one which

was known as the Dogra period, the Maharajas of which ruled over Jammu and Kashmir, including Ladakh, Baltistan and Gilgit.

The condition of Kashmir when he took it over has been described as "deplorable". Although the Government only demanded one half share of the crops grown, either by threat or favours promised but never kept by corrupt officials, they took their share in addition to this. The Maharaja was not a popular ruler, he let things drift—in his latter years he was a complete invalid—he had gained all that he could ever have hoped for and his position as a ruler had been consolidated and made secure by the British who were at hand in the event of trouble. In the Treaty of Amritsar he had given his undertaking "to join with the whole of his military force the British troops when employed in the hills or in the territories adjoining his possessions", and the British Government had promised to "give its aid to Maharaja Gulab Singh in protecting his territories from external enemies", so that he was able to sit back knowing that he had only to deal with any internal outbreaks.

It is recorded that on the day of his death from dropsy in 1857 there was an earthquake in the valley. On his deathbed he had distributed over one hundred thousand rupees to charity. This was indeed a great sacrifice for him to have made, for during the whole of his life he had grabbed at money; it is said that one of his subjects standing in the crowd had but to hold up a rupee as he passed in order to immediately catch the eye of the Maharaja to whom he wished to present a petition.

It is also recorded that an Englishwoman, Mrs. Ashby Carus-Wilson, prevented his five wives committing suttee at the cremation of his body: that was an Hindu custom in which, after the sandalwood funeral pyre had been built, the widows seated themselves on it—the first widow with the head of the corpse in her lap—and all were consumed by the fire. Way back in the time of Sikandar, who died in A.D. 1413, this Sultan in his persecution of the Hindus, had enforced the abolition of suttee, but it had returned with the loss of power by the Muslims, had probably done so before that time, maybe during the period when one of their more tolerant kings was on the throne.

Gulab Singh's third son, Ranbir Singh, succeeded him. In return for the services of both of these Maharajas to the British during the Indian Mutiny, it was agreed that the original agreement should be amended so that the Maharaja might adopt his own successor from the collateral branches of his family in the event of there being no male heirs of his body.

Ranbir Singh has been described by Lawrence as "a model Prince, devoted to his religion and to Sanskrit learning, but kind and tolerant to the Musalmans, to whom he allowed the free exercise of their religion". As a result of this he was popular with all his subjects, also with the Europeans to whom he was most hospitable—very different from what his father had been once he came to power—and permitting them to open dispensaries and schools. As opposed to the rulers who had gone before him, he was a family man, kindly, moral and simple in his life. He sat daily in public Durbar to receive and answer the petitions of his people; the size of the populations at that time was nowhere near what it had been, or now is of course. An enlightened ruler, he did his best to introduce into the State new staples, spending freely on sericulture, hops, vines and presses. His failing if any, was that he was too soft and kindly, had he but had the strength of will of his father, he could have done so much to develop the valley. Unfortunately during his rule there was a ghastly famine which lasted over two years, this being brought about by excessive rains which came at the wrong time of the year. During that period two-thirds of the population died of starvation and the city as well as the country was this time affected, so that trade also ceased. It took the Maharaja the rest of his reign—some five years—to clear up the troubles and again get his State into order, one of the principal improvements being to make a cart road into the valley, so providing for the importation of food in the event of a recurrence of such a disaster.

In 1877, upon the death of his father, Pratab Singh, as his eldest son, became the Maharaja. Under his rule, very ably assisted by a Council of State and a number of British Officers, Kashmir enjoyed peace at long last and made steady progress.

From all accounts, besides being a sick man most of his life,

as a ruler, he was also weak, while family intrigues did not help him early in his reign and the State fell into a deplorable condition. The Viceroy wrote him that "notwithstanding the ample resources of your State, your treasury was empty, corruption and disorder prevailed in every department and every office: Your Highness was still surrounded by low and unworthy favourites . . . ". The Maharaja agreed to the formation of a Council of Regency which for a year was presided over by Diwan Lachman Das, and after that by the Maharaja's brother Raja Amar Singh, who was also father of his heir. In 1891 the Maharaja was himself appointed as President of the Council, his brother becoming the Vice-President.

Perhaps the most famous of the British Officers at that time, and one who did most good for the people, was Sir Walter Lawrence who, by his suggested land settlement gave them a proper assessment of taxation of the land, the State claiming far less than the peasants had ever dreamed of in their wildest moments. The heavy taxes that trade had been made to bear were reduced, flood prevention, land reclamation and road-making taking a prominent part in the design for the future. With all this the land bore more fruit, the farmer made larger profits and as a result, with these increased profits the State doubled its revenue. The population increased rapidly.

From the time of the succession of this Maharaja the Viceroy of India had decided that the State of Jammu and Kashmir, although ruled over by its own Maharaja, being feudatory to the British Government like all the other Indian States, should have a British Resident in its capital, and Sir Oliver St. John was ordered to take up that appointment. Prior to that time, from 1851, the Maharaja had only agreed to the appointment of a seasonal British Officer on Special Duty.

Maharaja Pratab Singh was a highly orthodox Hindu—there are some who declare that he was priest-ridden, that he would arrive at no decision without consulting his pundits. In 1925 he died, after ruling for forty years. Just as he was about to breathe his last, in accordance with the Hindu custom, he was hastily carried down from his upstairs room in the palace so that he might die on Mother Earth. Here a cow stood waiting; a thread was tied between the dying Maharaja and the cow since

he was by that time too far gone to hold the animal's tail, and by so doing his soul was ensured a safe journey to rest for a while in Heaven. A Brahmin was also brought in from outside the State of Kashmir; he was shaved from head to foot, then presented with tokens of all those things which had been used by the old Maharaja, such as bed linen, cooking utensils, a motor car, a horse, gold, silver, money and so on. When the Maharaja expired, this Brahmin was deported from the State by the police and forbidden ever to return, for with him he carried away all the sins of the departed ruler.

Those who visited the State during his reign will always remember the Maharaja Pratab Singh as a little man who wore an enormous turban, who was the most generous of hosts, giving lavish State banquets which were before only a visionary story, and as a man possessing a most incredible memory and an enquiring eye.

There being no direct heir, his nephew Hari Singh, the son of the handsome Raja Amar Singh who had died in 1909, became the new Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, "and the steady progress of the State continued with peace within its borders".

Although by far the greater percentage of the people of the sub-continent of India, even until the very last, could not believe that it would happen, on August the 14th and 15th, 1947, the British Government transferred power to the newly-formed Dominions of Pakistan and India. Upon this happening the treaty relations which had until then existed between the British Crown and the Indian Princes lapsed, and by agreement it was left to the rulers of each of the States to decide as to whether they would join one or other of the Dominions.

Although he had for long known that the choice would be for him to make, the Maharaja of Kashmir could not arrive at a decision. He was a Hindu, the majority of his subjects were Muslims; the new Government of Pakistan declared itself a Muslim State, that of India had declared itself a secular State. The frontiers of Kashmir adjoined India on the south and Pakistan on the west, still the Maharaja dithered while both Dominions waited for his decision. Fighting broke out in the country, with tribesmen from the North-West Frontier adding

their contribution "to save their Muslim brothers from Hindu domination and subjection". The Maharaja, believing that he could no longer control the situation, moved from Srinagar to his winter capital Jammu, and on the 26th of October, 1947, signed a letter of accession of his State of Jammu and Kashmir to India.

Whilst accepting the accession, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Governor-General of India, explained to the Maharaja that since there had been some dispute as to the accession, it was his Government's wish that as soon as law and order were restored within the State, a plebiscite should take place to ascertain the wishes of the people.

The raiders got to within five miles of Srinagar before they retreated. The procrastinating ruler had laid his subjects open to arson, bloodshed, loot and rape, together with a condition of indecision which was to become for years a headache to the United Nations, an embarrassment to the Commonwealth and a cause for ill-feeling between the two newly-formed Dominions who, at the time of the handing over of the subcontinent of India by the British Government, would possibly have accepted any decision of the Maharaja as final, although he had—unlike any other ruling Prince—split up his country, giving Kashmir to Pakistan and Jammu to India.

And so ignominiously and unsung went Hari Singh, the last of the Dogra Maharajas, the last of the hereditary rulers of Kashmir. His son, the Yuveraj Karan Singh, a boy of but eighteen years of age, did not flee though; he remained in his father's stead, as Regent, but no longer as ruler, and after a space of three years he was deposed of that rank, but to be honoured with the title of Sadar-i-Riyasat—the first elected head of the State, a position to which any Kashmiri, whether he be of humble or noble birth, may be elected for a period of four years.

In these few pages it has only been possible to skim over the surface of the deeply interesting history of a State which has been under the rule—mostly cruel, harsh and savage—of so many foreigners, each in turn forcing their religion upon the people, offering them either a ghastly death or submission, and

wringing from them all the labour, taxes and produce that they could extract. Their good rule or misrule has left its deep mark upon the land and those who live there, a people whose qualities, whether good or bad, are to a very great extent a result of all this.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sightseeing in Srinagar

With a head full of the history of a place it is surprising the additional interest each building or ruin holds for the sightseer, and as soon as the rain ceased, after an early breakfast, I carried out my resolve to climb the thousand-foot hill behind the houseboat to look over the Takht-i-Sulaiman, that building which has been claimed as the oldest—in its foundations anyway—in all Kashmir.

The hill itself, which has been sacred to both Buddhists and Hindus, is interesting. It is believed by scientists that thousands, perhaps millions of years ago there was a terrific upheaval of the sea bed and the mountains and plains emerged from beneath the waters, forming land. Volcanoes appeared in some parts, bursting through the earth's heaving crust; the sea bed deposits which hardened into rocks, became covered with the ash and lava which belched from the craters, so forming the mountains and hills behind Srinagar, as well as that particular hill, which is really a spur of them. Experts who have examined the rock formation there declare it to be dried lava of volcanic origin from beneath the sea.

A pony track winds up the side of the hill facing the city; steep at first as it passes a Muslim graveyard which in springtime is a blaze of purple, mauve and white iris; the track is rough and loose in places, but for its first half is wide enough to drive a small car up, although the hairpin bends would make this difficult. The sides of the hill are covered with coarse grass, bushes and a few trees; every now and then a covey of frightened partridge, of which there are many, fly up from among the scrub.

There were a number of other visitors climbing up or coming

down the rough road. Here and there short cuts had been made over great boulders, but such tracks were for those who were used to mountain climbing. From half way up the hill there is a wonderful view of the six-thousand-foot-high valley below as one rests to regain breath for the next stage of the climb. Then stopping a while and looking over more to the right, there is the entrance to the Dal Lake with dozens of houseboats lined up side by side, divided one from the other by narrow, willow-covered, shady banks.

At one place near to the top is a rough pathway leading off; now seldom trodden, this encircles the temple which is many hundreds of feet above it, and it was the custom for pilgrims to walk around this seven times to gain merit, many even believing that their prayer would not be answered unless they performed the journey whilst keeping their eyes fixed the whole time on the temple as they stumbled along.

By the time I neared the summit I was beginning to wish that I had brought a flask of iced water with me, possibly reminded of it by seeing on the pathway the remains of a broken earthenware pitcher which some unfortunate had carried so far filled with the precious liquid, only to stumble and smash it.

Just ahead was a long, steep flight of limestone steps; these, I remembered reading, had once run the whole way up from the bottom of the hill. They had sunk in places, but considering the hundreds of years that they had been there were surprisingly even.

The top of the hill is a large, flat, open area shaded by a few trees. To one side is the great grey limestone temple which is in general cone-shaped and set on a huge stone octagonal base. From under a fine archway a handsome flight of steps leads up from the ground to the entrance of the temple round which there is a wide walk. The height of the temple proper is about twenty-five feet, its outer circumference about one hundred feet, and no mortar has been used in its construction. Its summit had been damaged; maybe in the dim past it was struck by lightning, or perhaps as one writer suggests, by an earthquake, for there is a record of this happening before, and the damage then being repaired by Zain-ul-Al-ul-din, although there is now

no sign of a further one having damaged the edifice elsewhere. The top is now surmounted by an iron framework containing an electric light, beacon fashion, and much like a cross between a sea-buoy and a radar frame.

The block-stone walls are about eight feet thick, the interior of the temple fourteen feet in diameter with a flat ceiling eleven feet high. In the centre of the floor, on a stone platform there is a lingam of polished black stone round which is carved a coiled serpent. I later saw many idols of the same phallic shape throughout the valley, one at Shiri, was carved with figures round it and twelve feet high. Abdul Fazal, writing during the last century, claimed that he had seen seven hundred places where there were carved figures of snakes which the people worshipped; he believed that the original religion of Kashmir was Ophite, or snake worship, which, when they turned to the Hindu faith, the people could not entirely throw off, so that the one was absorbed into the other; hence the idol in this temple, the phallic lingam, which is the symbol of Shiva, round which is the coiled serpent.

The roof of the building is supported by four octagonal stone pillars; on one are some Persian inscriptions, on another writing which tells by whom, and when the *but* or idol was made, this being more than nineteen hundred years ago. At the back of this particular pillar a further inscription claims that it was raised up by some other person in the year ——, and we are left unsatisfied, for the date is now below the pavement.

Before the idol were a few flowers which had been strewn there by worshippers, also some coins resting on a ten-rupee note; I have an idea that this was a "call-bird" to the pilgrims. A candle was burning in front of the idol and round it were the signs of dozens of others which had burned down; nearby was a box of matches and some dead sticks. To one side had been brushed the faded flowers contributed the day before, and perhaps many days prior to that. It was all very untidy and, I felt, lacking in religious atmosphere.

The priest who showed me round was a strange kind of fellow, wearing a khaki pullover on top of his shirt. It was he who switched on the electric light over the idol by the simple

process of hooking the lamp holder on to the bare wire of the mains.

The view down on the city of Srinagar and right across to the Hari Parbat fort was superb. The air had been washed clean and clear by the rains, and on the Colonel's advice I had brought field glasses with which I could follow the winding river for miles, picking out those places we had passed on our way down to Baramula. In the far distance were the snow-capped mountains, then over to the right, patches of trees in the famous Moghul gardens, below us the new palace of the Maharaja, with white walls and flattish red roofs as ugly and uninteresting as an army barracks, whilst above and backing it were the glorious and grand mountains with purples, browns and greys all mixed and shaded with olive greens. Before it were the waters of the Dal Lake as still as a mirror flat on its back with two or three spots where fishermen's boats stood still, and two long feather-like streaks as shikaras skimmed across the lake the waters of which were at the edge green, with the weed blending with the banks so that one could not see where they met. Here and there the tall straight poplars growing close to the lake, stood out against the reflection of the mountains on its still and peaceful surface.

In the autumn, with the coming of the dawn, looking down on the valley is as though one is seeing it through a veil of pale blue which vanishes as the day advances. With the setting of the sun and the lengthening of the shadows, it again returns, first to envelop the lakes and river from which it appears to rise, then covering the whole city and the surrounding countryside, but at that time of the day with a shell pink shade of mist which gradually changes to a glorious red before the shadows of the hills and the trees smother all in a darkness broken only by the twinkling lights from the houses of the crowded city and the far-spread villages; lights which in the inky blackness are like golden earth-bound stars vying with their silver sisters in the heavens.

I turned to leave the temple; it was dirty and unswept, paper littered everywhere, and when I asked the priest why it was not kept cleaner he explained that it was because of the lack of water, that they had to carry it all the way up the hill and even

then if a weary pilgrim asked for a drink it could not be refused. I did not bother to explain that the paper did not require water for its picking up, but an old Hindu gentleman nearby dared to reprove the priest through me by explaining that in the Maharaja's time they would never have dared leave it so dirty, and telling me that it was the Maharaja who had installed the beacon light there.

Down on the ground, standing on piles, there was a wooden hut which reminded me of a chicken house. In this the priests lived. At ground level was a shape of stones which might either have been the foundation of some other old building or, as they declared, an old stone tank.

I started down the hill again, meeting dozens of Hindus toiling up, for it was a Monday, that day of the week in which they always go there to worship. The most propitious day of the Hindu year on which they repair to this temple is known as Sheoratri. It seemed as though I had struck that particular day by the numbers of stout Hindu women who were puffing and panting as they struggled almost on their knees up the pathway. Then I came upon a man wrapped in a blanket, with a towel round his neck and carrying a brass pot full of water on his shoulder. In his poor English he explained that he was the priest of the temple, that at dawn he had walked down the hill to take his bath—hence the towel—and now carried back a pot of water. I wondered if the broken pitcher near the summit of the hill might have been his and learning by that experience he had made sure of not repeating the loss by this time bringing a brass pot. He told me the other fellow was really the sweeper; which at once explained his resentment at my comment as to the dirt there, though neither of them looked very priest-like to me.

From the foot of the hill I hailed a tonga—these are the horse-drawn, two-wheeled traps, much like a dog cart but lower slung and with a canvas canopy over all four seats, which ply for hire. Although the rates for these are fixed, I had already learnt from experience that it is always advisable to arrange the charge before the journey, otherwise there are invariably demands or pleadings—depending on the tonga wallah—for more than whatever one offers him for the journey.

I had refused to pay the charge demanded by the only good one there, refused to travel behind the poor emaciated horse which was drawing another, the driver of which was more than willing to take me for lower than I had offered the first, and had almost arranged with the third when driver number one brought his tonga up at a trot and accepted the correct price. Such is the procrastination of the Kashmiri trader, who waits until the very last moment, and not until he sees a sale being lost to another under his nose does he give in.

A quarter of an hour's drive—sitting as is usual and advisable, in the back seat facing the way we had gone—through the back road of the city, one of the few which is not crowded close with houses and shops, and after passing a number of quite interesting buildings, we drew up at a partially ruined stone gateway entrance to a roadway leading up to the fort on the hill Hari Parbat—the translation of this name being "The Green Hill"—one which matches like a sister that on which is built the temple I had just visited, the two being at either end of the city.

The historical legend there told of how the hill on which the fort is built came into existence is typical of all those not only told by parents to children of the land, but believed by many of the parents themselves. Lifting a portion out from their mythical history, briefly it is that in the dim, distant past there dwelt in the valley a wicked demon named Tasand—some say he assumed the form of a dragon. It was he who caused the storms which arose on the lake; the people were fearful of him and fled the valley. The gods invoked the help of the sun and the moon in their search for him, for he had hidden away and could not be found. Then in desperation, after years of meditation they called on the goddess Parvati who, assuming the form of a great bird, flew to Sumer, picked up a pebble in her beak, and cast it down from her rocky fortress on to the demon in the valley.

As it fell through the air it increased in size so that by the time it reached the earth it had become a small mountain which covered him. But he was very strong and shook the mountain; so that together with her lion and the gods, Parvati sat on it and crushed the demon to death.

Most of the bastioned wall built by Akbar round the foot of the hill remains, and within this area there are almond orchards, for the soil is well suited to them. A wide flight of new limestone steps has now been made up from the village at the foot of the hill to the rather beautiful wood-built shrine with galleries and spires; round this are many stone slabs indicating the graves of those who wished to lie in rest near to the Saint. As usual with these places one is reminded by the attendants that for good one should leave some money on the brass tray which is always there awaiting contributions "for the upkeep of the historical building". From within the enclosure, with the spires of the mosque and shrine adding to the picture, there is a rather lovely view of the fort above, which otherwise has a foreground of hard rock and shale.

A small boy who assured me that he was the son of the head priest—they all claim to be priests near these places and I never did unravel the riddle—offered to show me a short cut up the hillside to the fort and so save an hour's climb round it. The very narrow path clinging to the hillside that we took after passing a great square stone tank of green water in which a few people were then washing in the bathing boxes, was covered with loose stones. Just at the steepest part, where the surface was most insecure, and where one used hands as much as feet to ascend, I was confronted with a huge billy-goat which, with head down refused to budge and when I attempted to force it out of the way with my stick, threatened to charge me. Looking down to where I should have finished up after his attentions, I decided to return and was about to reverse when the small boy who had gone ahead arrived back, saw my predicament, picked up a large stone, and with it hit the goat on its rump. It leapt high in the air and instead of jumping down the hill, capered up it and out of my pathway. Looking round I saw that there were hundreds of goats on that hillside: there was hardly a blade of green left and they were living on the shrubs, yet none looked as thin as the majority of the horses one saw drawing the tongas in the city.

The goat track led to the main roadway just below the only entrance to the outer fort. As is usual with these, I first went into a large, square, covered, porchlike room with its exit to one

side, from which a long flight of stone steps led up inside the outer wall. There was nothing very warlike about the place; almond trees had been planted there and overhung the worn steps which were protected with high thick walls. At the top I came out into the open; Kashmiri guards demanded my pass—which I was fortunately prepared with—and after relieving me of my camera, permitted me to enter the fort proper. Again, the entrance gate was most unpretentious, with double doors about nine feet wide and twelve to fourteen feet high protecting it; they were of stout timbers, the upper portion decorated with foot long ugly iron spikes standing straight out, a common feature with old Indian fortification gates, these being so placed that elephants could not be used by the invaders to charge and force the doors, although I have been told that this was easily overcome by simply placing a camel side on between the elephant and the spikes.

Inside was a large water tank, big enough for conversion into a swimming pool. This was the drinking water supply for the fort in case of invasion. There were dozens of small rooms with age-old heavy wooden doors, chains and rusty padlocks. The guard who acted as my guide pleaded that he had no idea what was inside or for what purpose they had been used.

I examined the walls and am fairly certain that they just consisted of rocks bound together with mud; the mud mortar could be picked out even with the finger nail. Then I climbed a wooden stable ladder to the top of the wall. The roofs covering the rooms below its protection were made of boards covered with earth in which grass was growing. The whole place was so crude, clumsy and poor, although the walls are thick and not showing obvious signs of decay, that one is left wondering how it could have lasted so long. It seemed as though one five-hundred-pound bomb would have blown it sky high, yet it had weathered several hundred years and more than one invasion in the past.

I should have liked to have taken a photograph inside the place, but that being impossible, took one of the doorway in spite of its being in shadow. I continued along the tree-shaded walk which ran outside the main fort, to come upon a small

battery of very old field guns. One was obviously in use. Then it dawned upon me that it was from this place that the noonday gun was fired so that all in the city might know the hour. Gone were the days—so recent though—when traitors to the Governor or the Maharaja were imprisoned chained to the walls, tortured and suffered awful deaths here, or long ago when for months men defended its walls. Its only use now is that of a clock, yet to the people who live in the city four hundred feet below, as they look towards it, it could be a reminder of the years that have gone; to some, of short-lived glory for their families, to others, of losses and misery to theirs.

It should never be allowed to fall into decay, to crumble and sink within the hill from which it was built, for only by such a reminder—one which all in the city and not the few who live nearby may see at all times—can a people not forget the past and on that build their future. Looking up towards the old fort they can dwell on the power and the strength that was once within their land, and turning towards the other side can gaze up at the solid stone temple on the other hill and not lose sight of that spiritual symbol of the help and strength of God, that which He—if called upon by earnest prayer—can give to them if he will.

Back in the tonga I was taken through the narrow streets which in many places were seething with people, children running to and fro, dozens of tongas, bicycles and dogs all over the road. It is always best that Europeans should not sit facing the oncoming traffic under such conditions, for they will never be able to believe that at the very last moment all in their way will remove themselves as the driver shouts to them and the horse charges on at the same unchecked speed.

We came out near to the great red Jama Masjid. The largest though not the most beautiful mosque in Srinagar, it is best described as a grand building. The central courtyard is spacious, shaded with great trees and cooled by water from the Sind River which flows to a central ablution pool round which the turf is green and only broken by the four paths leading to it from the minars.

The cloisters are about a hundred and twenty-five yards long

with four minarets, one in the centre of each side. The roofs of all these being supported by two rows of pillars, three hundred and seventy-two in all, the smaller ones under the cloisters being about twenty feet high, and those of the minarets more than double that height. These are of deodar wood, stout, straight and strong.

I clambered up the staircase, the first flight of brick, the upper of wood, to the top of one of the minarets. At one place half way up I looked through an archway on to the roof of the cloisters; this I found was made of wood covered with earth bound together by the roots of the grass which grew there. As I climbed the staircase I noticed lots of pieces of short stick, then arriving on the last great platform—the upper side of the ceiling to the entrance below—saw dozens of pigeons' eggs laid on small nests of them; there were hundreds of the birds flying round the mosque.

From the top square-roofed gallery crowned by a high pinnacle from which the mullah calls the faithful to prayers, I looked out over the mud-covered roofs of the houses in the city below and across to the fort on the hill which I had just left. From this high place, set against a blue sky, it looked almost beautiful, whereas looking up at it from the foot of the hill it appeared just cold and uninteresting, being impossible to tell where the hill ended and the walls of the fort commenced.

Down below again I was shown the verses on the great doors of the mosque which tell that in the first place it was built by King Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din; since then it had been burnt down and rebuilt many times; the first occasion being way back in the year A.D. 909.

Like the Takht-i-Sulaiman which is a Hindu temple built on ground sacred to the Buddhists who know it as Pus-Pahari, so the ground on which the Jama Masjid is built is also sacred to the Buddhists, the followers of that religion who still visit it from Ladakh in the north, knowing it by the name of Tsitsung Tsublak Kang.

The Hindus claim that in about the year A.D. 1400, materials from a large stone temple which had been built by King Tarapida in A.D. 695, were incorporated into the mosque, and round the building there most certainly are signs of the remains

of several stone temples. So the three principal religions of the valley are mingled—perhaps one should say that one is tinged with the others. It is interesting to hear that during the reign of the Dogra rulers, who were Hindus, on more than one occasion the Maharaja contributed generous amounts for the restoration of this great mosque.

CHAPTER SIX

Canal Life

THE following day, together with my host who had been unable to face the climbs I had done, I set off early in the shikara with the bearer, lunch basket and tea basket, for the lakes and waterways.

Going down river we turned off into the canal which joins it opposite the Sher Garhi White palace. This canal, the Tsunt-i-Kul or Apple Tree Canal, is ugly and congested with barges for some considerable distance up. After a few hundred yards the flow of its waters into the Jhelum River is controlled by great iron gates, and at times when the gates are first lifted it takes hours for the flood to slow down sufficiently to permit anything like safe travel through it in a flat-bottomed shikara.

We arrived there at one such time, but the Colonel was determined that we could get through if only the shikara wallahs exerted themselves a little, and standing up red in the face, he demanded that they did so, threatening that if they did not know their job then he would "damned soon show them how". That was sufficient to hurt their pride; they hitched a long rope to the pointed bow of the shikara, this one of them carried through and together with dozens of small boys as willing helpers, started pulling, whilst the two remaining boatmen stood up and grabbed the looped chains which are staked into the stone walls of the gateway for that especial purpose, so pulling the shikara forward through the rushing waters. It was like going through rapids the wrong way round, and half way through I wished I had joined the pullers. We were watched by scores of men and boys who were hanging over the bridge and crowding the banks, all of whom, together with the bargemen in the great boats ahead were shouting advice and instructions, no

doubt adding in Kashmiri, which neither of us could understand, their comments on the two crazy Englishmen who insisted on going through before the swirling waters had slowed down. Our boatmen were receiving their share of the comments also. When I turned round I saw the bearer bolt-eyed and clinging tight to the backboard of our seat. It must have been good entertainment for the onlookers, but we eventually made it, though told later by a "box wallah" who was also waiting, that no other shikaras ventured through for well over an hour after us, by which time the barges were also trying to get down stream and the canal was choked tight with boats.

The canal twists and turns. More especially during the spring and the autumn there are always dozens of great houseboats endeavouring to go either up to the Dal Lake, or down to the river, and it needs all one's patience to stand the strain of pushing between these and the barges lining the banks, wondering the whole time when the frail shikara will be crushed to matchwood.

Just when we imagined we were clear of these, we came on great rafts of logs filling the waterway outside the boatbuilders' yards; these were those we had watched being carried down by the river coming from miles up-stream, the ferryman controlling them sometimes living in a barge which trails behind, or in the temporary shelter erected on them, and steering rafts which are sometimes a hundred yards long. How they managed to get them through the gate and up the canal was beyond me.

In the tree-shaded yards we could see the boatbuilders at work; the wood is sawn and worked to shape and size only when actually required for any part of the boat. The great logs were resting over a cross-bar, it being much like a see-saw with one end on the ground. At each end of a great saw the men stood, one on the ground under the log and the other on the bar on which it rested, and so, up and down they cut planks from the log, gradually getting lower and lower so that finally the man below was on his knees sawing.

About a mile up from the Jhelum, just on a bend, we came upon a Hindu temple with shining silver-pointed dome, built high on the bank among shady trees. The priest's house on the water-front was quaint with carved windows and stone steps under an arch room going down to the water, where a servant

was doing some washing. From then on, the right bank is known as Chinar Bagh, being a mass of giant elephant-grey tree trunks and branches with great maple-like leaves, a fresh green in the spring, flaming red in the autumn, gradually changing to a glorious bronze and holding to the trees for weeks before falling to the ground to be gathered up and stored away for winter fodder for the cows, which even at that time of the year as they grazed seemed to prefer the odd fallen leaf to the emerald green grass.

Save for the fact that it is flooded over during the spring and early summer months, the tree-covered island with its green turf would seem to be an excellent place for a houseboat. At one time it was most popular and called Bachelors Island, for from here the city and European part of Srinagar is close and handy, whilst the Dal Lake is quite near.

Under the village, which is protected by a great bund, the canal turns sharply to the right and we soon arrived at the Dal Gate lock. We were fortunate for once, for they were letting the water out of the lock into the canal, the lake being on a higher level. No sooner had just a chink shown between these great wooden gates than the first shikara pushed its way out, closely followed by another, then others, some with passengers, others almost overloaded with vegetables, all fresh and clean and colourful, great water melons, purple brinjals, baskets of scarlet chillies, cauliflower and tomatoes. The boatman on the journey into the city, worked hard, usually sitting on his haunches in the front of the flat-bottomed punt and scooping his way through the other shikaras, with a small boy at the back adding his contribution. On the journey back to the market gardens later in the day the man will probably be sleeping in the bottom of the boat, whilst the boy will be paddling.

The lock-keeper is a lover of flowers and the banks are a mass of colourful beds which we could only see when the water was raised to the lake level before the gates at the other end were opened up. In the meantime our companions in the lock, box wallahs selling carved boxes and embroidery, who had pestered us to "Only look see, sahib!" having given us up as hopeless, moved towards the exit gate, to press through as soon as they moved, and a shikara which until that time had remained at the

back end, quietly came up beside us, the gentleman passenger, wearing a red fez, bent forward with a toothy smile of greeting and asked, "I wonder if either of you gentlemen would like to visit my museum which is just over there, to inspect some of the valuable Persian carpets I have on display?" I can only conclude that he spends his day in the lock, soliciting trade in this fashion, and from his hired taxi shikara, smart suit and well-kept shop, it would appear that he is successful with this new fashion of approach to visitors who cannot get away from him until the gates open. But I must admit that although they press, these super Kashmir salesmen do not pester beyond one's patience; they instinctively know when hopes of a sale have gone, and move on with a friendly grin—doubtless hoping for a change of mind, for "There is always tomorrow".

Outside we pushed our way through the swarm of waiting shikaras and punts, and on towards the lake. The journey had so far taken us nearly an hour and a half in going round, for that reason most of the people who live on the river send their shikaras loaded with lunch baskets off before breakfast, and follow by going through from the Srinagar Club to the Dal Gate on foot, for it is only a quarter of an hour's most pleasant walk under the shady trees which are planted on either side of the shallow canal they follow.

On this first water journey we turned off by a wide stretch of water on the left and followed it to branch off again into narrower channels. On all sides were plantations of willows, with houseboats moored, their verandahs looking over the canal, and nearby the ever-present cook boat with seemingly dozens of children playing nearby and women on the banks pounding corn with great poles in stone mortars, usually working in pairs and singing as they worked; we watched a mother and her daughter both pounding in the same mortar having a terrific row, both venting their temper with each thrust—the corn made into flour no doubt in record time. They seemed to be covered with silver ornaments, many bracelets on the arms, and dozens of earrings hanging, which with the older women were actually passed through the lobes which had been dragged down in a most ugly fashion; with the younger ones these had been supported by a wire which passed over the

crown of the head, but this I did not know for some time, since the women are seldom seen with heads uncovered.

On either bank the earth had been built up with silt or weeds from the water; it was black and looked good. Here and there a pair of twin poles was set upright on the bank, sometimes a growing tree was used: on top of this a pole was balanced, one end held the weights, great stones, the other had a bucket shaped like the traditional witch's cauldron suspended from it by a long rope. A man wearing only a dirty cloth skull cap and baggy pyjama-like grey cotton trousers—with no shirt or shoes —stood on the bank edge holding the rope, dragging it down to dip the bucket in the water; the weight did the heavy work of lifting it from the canal, and all that he had to do was to tilt it with his foot into a gully which led away through his garden. He worked as though mechanically; seemingly untired he did not even welcome my asking him to stop for a minute so that I could take a photograph. These Kashmiri men are certainly tough and strong, more especially when working for themselves. Their physique so seen is magnificent, their colour a glorious bronze.

We continued on until the canal divided, on the right side we could hear and then see through the casement windows of a factory, the looms on which mats were being made, the verandahs were festooned with hanks of dyed wools. In the centre of the V was a garden, garlanded with climbing roses and the rest a splash of many colours. The house was not unlike the Residency in its design; it was that of the Governor.

Following up the canal I realized that although we had for the past hour been right away from the city, we had now returned by a back way to it, for when I looked up at the buildings which were getting close upon us as the canal narrowed, I occasionally caught sight of alleys so common in Srinagar. We passed under a very old stone camel-shaped bridge which reminded me of willow pattern china; ahead some of the verandahs which overhung the canal were supported on long poles which were set on its banks. The water was getting shallow, it was filthy and stank, whilst its flow was blocked at places by truckloads of garbage which had been thrown there. The Mar canal, the spring beauty of which I had read and heard so much, had become nothing

more than a rubbish dump, so that we were glad to scramble ashore, climb up the steep flight of stone steps and walk back on a road to meet the boatmen who had somehow managed to get the shikara stern first into deep water. In it we made a hurried return to cleaner water and fresher air.

As we came into more open country the canal gradually spread its banks, the main waterway down which we had come turned off to the right; to the left, we came out on a wider part close-covered in water-weed, emerald green in colour and as bright, soft and flat as a velvet billiard table. Looking ahead we saw that the canal continued, gradually becoming less wide, shaded by overhanging silver-grey willows on the banks. It seemed as if there could be no way through, but as the shikara moved forward the men kept to the middle of the stream and the weeds opened up for our passage as the nose of the boat touched them, closing again after us, but making hard work for the paddlers as they dipped into the masses of weed which below the surface were matted and long like tangled hair so that it had to be flung off after each dip as it clung to the heart-shaped paddle.

It was interesting to watch the little flock of fat geese and ducks which every house, whether large or small, seemed to own. On our approach the drake would call to his busily working wives who were only visible by their tails, their heads groping about under the water, and then the head of the family would quack his way ahead of them, making a passage through the weeds, while his drab grey women-folk bustled along behind him exactly following the course he had taken.

There were always dozens of children playing in the water, usually naked and always laughing and shrieking, the sound of their voices only broken by the occasional shrill shout of one of the mothers—Kashmiri peasant women's voices are not pretty when they are excited or shout. It was amusing to one who knew his north-west India to see the bigger boys, on seeing the pugaree of my Pathan bearer, yelling to each other, dash out from the water and race as though for their lives; such is the Pathan's reputation after hundreds of years of raiding Kashmir, when among the loot, they carried away as many good-looking boys as they did beautiful Kashmiri girls.

Nearby women were making rush mats on the bankside. Two trees had been selected some twelve feet apart, and suspended between these at about two feet above ground was a framework, the ends being wooden poles, much like broom sticks. Between them harp-like strings were run some six or eight inches apart. Through these strings the women were threading the rushes—hand weaving—and after two or three had been so worked between the strings, a loose wooden bar—itself on the strings—was pushed down on to the rushes to make them sit close. Nearby stood bundles of rushes which had been collected up from the ground after being dried off, and as we watched a boat came alongside the bank stacked high with more which had just been cut, these being easily ten feet long.

We passed close to other passenger shikaras, both crews of boatmen endeavouring to hold the narrow cleared channel. There was a college boat, the master sitting on a kitchen chair in the middle of it and the boys, many of whom had given up oars for paddles, rowing and scooping among the weeds, hopelessly out of time and moving forward at a slower pace with their twenty-four than we did with our three. Then there were the flat-bottomed grey little punts, each with an old woman squatting on her haunches at the front, grey hair hanging round a weather-worn face and grey eyes now dull, throwing back the wide sleeves of her frock-like gown and scooping away through the weeds, for she would cling to the side of the canal in the same way as the younger women who continued scooping the water though feeding a baby which they somehow contrived to rest across their knees. The men who passed us with punts would be standing up and bending as they went their way, pushing with long thrusts of the pole instead of a paddle through the dense water weed, their magnificent muscles standing out, many unusually handsome in countenance, so that one wondered, if brain matched brawn, why they continued to labour as they did with small patches of land, or in meagre jobs, for all wore the stitched cloth skull cap of the peasant class, the more intelligent ones affecting an individuality by placing them at jaunty angles, the less bright ones planting them glumly and squarely on their heads.

Here and there, usually at places where the waters branched

off, small shops would be found, either built on a little patch of ground or on piles driven in close to the bank so that boats and shikaras could come up alongside. Most of them sold groceries and foodstuffs, but there were some with sewing machines whirling, even potters' shops where the crude but serviceable Kashmir "china" is made, this being glazed earthenware coloured yellow, green, red or brown, with thumb mark patterns and quite serviceable for everyday use, besides being extremely cheap and decorative though brittle. There was one shop, the owner of which also plied the waterways and lakes in his shikara, where miniature wooden houseboats, cook boats and shikaras were made and sold, these being souvenirs the visitors love, especially if they happen to be models of the houseboat on which they are living, and the majority are standard to type.

There were well-built houses with gardens, one or two of these laid out in the English fashion, much as one would find on the banks of the River Thames, others after the Kashmir style, with little garden, a many-storied house of red brick, flattish roof and open windows, near to the water.

At one place we saw a shikara being loaded skyscraper high with willow baskets of all kinds, lunch baskets, work baskets, bottle baskets, market baskets and shopping baskets of many shapes and sizes, with sets of these fitting one into the other. These were being carried out from a so-called "factory", a shed in which, we found when we got out to have a look at it, a complete family of basket-makers were working. The head of the family, a very old man, was blind; his grandson was telling us that he also expected to become a grandfather at any time. They proudly explained that it was English Willow that they used, meaning that it came from willows which had been imported from England long before. As I watched the family working on the cane, although by then not moving so quickly with his fingers, the old man finished his baskets well before the others who stopped to look up to make a point as they spoke to us.

The canes are hacked from the trees in the late summer, tied in bundles and placed in a high V of the branches so that the cattle and goats cannot get at them. In the winter the leaves are

stripped as fodder for the cattle and the canes of suitable size then graded and used for basket making, after being steeped in water. The work coming out from this garden factory was excellent. I checked up on prices in the city and found that the middleman made a profit of nearly two hundred per cent on that which he paid the makers. I suppose it had never dawned on those people to look into this themselves and consider the advantage of opening a shop.

After a while we came upon the main stream which goes through to the lakes, the weeds had been cleared to some extent here; possibly the constant traffic up and down had made it impossible for them to spread, though in places reeds had taken their place, to be broken only by the great flat leaves of the lotus which are prolific on the lake. With the fall of the year these leaves slowly wither, the flower pods stand up alone above the water, and as we came upon them two children in a punt pulled alongside our shikara and offered first to us and then the boatmen, bundles of lotus pods which are a vegetable in Kashmir. Way back by the reeds we watched a man standing up in a punt and plunging a pronged pole into the bed of the lake, lifting it he brought up to the surface a long white thick growth; it was the root of the lotus plant, known as nadru, again known as a vegetable and much used in winter by the people of the city.

Every now and then little brown water hens would half-fly half-scull over the weeds away from us as we went slowly on. In places we came on dozens of large dragon-flies, some light blue, others yellow and yet more with red bodies, their colours seeming to have melted into their near-transparent wings, as for a while they hovered, then darted away; swallows wheeled round overhead when we came near to a house, which was obviously their home. The canal banks were a mass of colour, in parts white with clover, blue with forget-me-nots and yellow with the hanging cucumber, marrow and melon vines which had been planted there at the water's edge, whilst in other places they had been overgrown and were mauve with convolvulus, and red with roses which were wild, but the blossoms double, the petals of some being red inside and orange on the outside.

We came upon a space clear of rushes, lotus and water weeds. An old fisherman was baiting a line of hooks as he sat in his

shikara which his small granddaughter was keeping out of the way of others passing. Here channels crossed, and standing erect on a small island in the middle was a short, circular column of stone. Another shikara had moved towards it, I overheard the pundit in it, who was showing his friends round the valley, telling them that it was but another idol similar to that on the Takht, the rounded top having been worn flat by the annas placed there by market gardeners on their way to the city in the hope that by so doing they would secure good prices for their produce—advance commission to the gods.

When this shikara had gone off, our boatman moved forward and explained that what we had heard was what the Kashmiri pundits always said, but that the people of the valley knew differently, for there were three stones in all, one also on either bank. The one on the right bank has a pointed top and was once a banker who used to charge more than thirty-three and a third interest on loans, the one with the flat top was a mat-seller who sold mats by a measure which was a fifth short of the correct amount, while the other was a milkman who mixed the water of the canal with his milk. The gods had heard and seen these wicked men doing these things and as a punishment and a lesson for all time to the people, had turned them into stone; so they stand until this day.

We pulled over to the bank for lunch, and sat there watching the many little kingfishers, of which there are thousands round the lakes, on stocky bright red legs with which they never walk, sitting on the overhanging, slender, bending twigs with eyes fixed on the water. Suddenly there was a vivid flash of blue and green as one dived into the water below, to come up with a little silver fish in his long black beak, land on the prow of an old half-sunken boat, there to bang the life out of the minnow before devouring it whole. They uttered curious twittering cries. The boatman sought out one of their nests for us to see, first showing us the small hole which led to it in the river bank, then by carefully scraping away for over two feet disclosing the larger oval egg chamber at the end of the passage. It was out of the breeding season, so that there were no eggs, but these are round and white, numbering up to seven before the hen bird sits to hatch them.

We went on, passing here and there a farmhouse with its buildings nearby. These are all the same, built of wood, the ground floor being used as a sheep and cattle pen, the first floor as living quarters for the farmer and his family, and the roof, the gable ends of which are left open, set aside as a store for winter fodder, so that when the sheep are shut below them with the fodder protecting the roof, the farmer and his family are kept warm during the winter months. Only a very few of the houses had glass at the windows, most were wooden-shuttered, some had tattered pieces of sacking or brown paper which had closed the windows the previous winter and had been torn down with the coming of spring. There was no sign of a chimney stack, and the roofs were either boarded or covered with earth and grass, just as are most of those in the city. It was a Dutch traveller to Kashmir from Antwerp who in about 1625 mentioned that onions were then grown on the roofs of the town houses.

In the walls of the houses we often saw circles with a hole in the centre in and out of which bees passed. These were the hives used in the valley. They are made of earthenware and rather like a two-foot-long chimney-pot with a lid on it, or to those who garden, a better description would be a rhubarb forcing pot. The hive is set with its base against the inner wall of the room, a hole or holes being bored through for the bees to leave and enter the pot, while the lid is sealed with clay. The Kashmiri feeds his swarms throughout the winter, but considers the warmth of the room should be sufficient to keep them alive during the cold days; unfortunately it is not and many die, but they do not seem yet to have learnt a lesson. The bees are remarkably tame there; the peasants even resort to tying the queen bee with a cotton from her leg to the comb when they think she is likely to follow the other queens from the hive; often three or four swarms issue from the one hive. To remove the honey, of which two harvests are gathered each year, the lid is taken off, smoke blown in to drive the bees from it, and the combs then cut out.

Outside, standing high on big rocks, were the corn stores, separate buildings with boarded floors, walls and roof, the entrance being near to the eaves and reached by a step ladder;

the corn is drawn off when required through a hole in the floor.

Close to the buildings poplars and willows grew, and in the nearby orchards were apple, pear, apricot and mulberry trees. Nearby was always to be seen the aged spreading walnut tree, the gathering place for all in the evening and for the old men during the day. The walnut trees belong to the village as a whole; they may not be cut down without first obtaining the permission of the State. Some are massive. I have seen one with a girth of eighteen feet and still bearing heavy crops of nuts.

We came upon the floating gardens, a unique feature of the lake. At first I imagined them to be dry land with strips of water between them, and in fact they do become so after many years. These are made by cutting off from the side of the marsh-land a long strip of matted weed and bulrush bed some twenty yards long and a yard wide; the underpart is also cut away so that the portion is about two feet thick. This is then towed by a punt to the desired position and anchored there by poles being driven into the lake bed at the corners. To this, further weed, which has been hooked up from the bottom of the canal or lake, is added, being sandwiched between layers of mud and earth. It is manured and added to each year with rotted weeds and canal silt. These floating gardens require no labour expended on them in watering the crops, and grow such vegetables as cucumbers, melons, pumpkins, tomatoes, and such-like whilst the more solid ones yield peas, cabbages, cauliflower, and even beets, onions and potatoes.

A few days later we watched one being moved. For this two punts were used, one on either side as it was being poled down the canal to another position. At first not noticing the punts, it shook us a little to see a lump of land complete with cultivated plant life bearing down on us. They say that occasionally one farmer steals another's floating garden. It is unusual though, and they are seldon moved from one place to another.

That day we came upon a punt deep in the water which was almost flowing over its sides. It was piled high like a hay-cart with weeds which the man standing at one end was lifting with a hooked pole from the bed of the lake and slopping into the punt. At the other end sat a small boy with an ordinary paddle with which he was scooping out from the bottom of the punt

the water which drained through from the wet weed into the pit at his feet, while at the same time he was keeping the punt out of the way of the traffic.

Further along we came on another village with its old stone bridge crossing the canal and all the houses, some many stories high, crowding on each other and the waterway as though every foot of land was precious. At one flight of wide stone steps men were busy washing live sheep in the water, at another boys were washing the newly embroidered gubbas in order to bring out the colour to its best before sending them on to the shop-keepers; we tried to buy from them but strangely enough they refused, although they could have had from us a much higher price than the trader would have given.

Everywhere there seemed to be children, as though fascinated by it, playing in the water with no one near to save them if they fell into a deep part, and I knew that few could swim. My comment on this to the boatmen brought, "We soon get plenty more where they come from, sahib. Kashmiri men easy getting these chicko!" They laughed as they said it, but the lack of concern left me wondering if they did not really feel that way about these children.

We went up the waterway, through the channel cleared by the frequent passage of shikaras; on the right there is a large island on which are grown Lombardy poplars. Just where the channel narrows before widening out again, a most magnificent chinar stands out from the tip of a small island with a house built near to it, the branches of the tree spreading out so that they cover half the waterway, its roots protected by a stone wall. There must be a perfect view from here during the evening lights, with the lake stretching out to the far mountains the colours of which change with the setting sun and the rising moon, and the occasional light on the water from a night fisherman's shikara, while across the sky come the dark shapes in formation of flighting night herons which live in the chinar grove near to Hazrat Bal.

Eventually we found ourselves on the lake and close upon that particular village with its spread of stone steps leading up from the lake. A little over to the left of the village is a mosque which is the greatest shrine of the Muslims in Kashmir, for

within it rests one of the Prophet's hairs. This sacred relic is held on high and shown to the people on certain days of the year. It is recorded that it was brought to Kashmir by Khwaja Nurdin from Bejapur in A.D. 1700. It is also said that one lac—that is one hundred thousand—rupees were paid for it.

During recent years the outer courtyard has been rebuilt with a wall of limestone and paving stones. Still the old chinars and willows remain to shelter the masses of Muslims who congregate there always on Fridays, but many more on the special occasions, then they number thousands wearing their best clothes, the children with gold embroidered, brightly coloured velvet hats shaped like page-boys' pillboxes, but worn straight on the head; for these occasions new clothes must always be worn. The men outnumber the women by ninety-nine per cent, most of the women having to remain at home although they may not be strictly in purdah. Just a very few may have come in the hundreds of shikaras which tightly pack the steps, but they stop in the boat covered in their burquas, the smaller children either remaining, or occasionally running back to them. A few will venture up the stepway to the many shops which sell sweets and toys on all festive occasions, some may examine pieces of cloth, keeping their backs to the masses and only half-uncovering the face as they finger it. They imagine that cloth purchased on such a day and from such a place cannot fail to bring good fortune with it.

The men and young boys go forward, they stand in long rows in the courtyard, and following, repeat and perform their prayers, all standing with heads bowed, hands clasped loosely before them, all holding their hands to heaven, all going down on their knees, all touching the ground with their foreheads with eyes closed in prayer. There may be a few purdah women of the poorer men standing at the very back of the multitude, occasionally a courtesan will be seen; as so happened we saw one arrive in her private shikara with a beautiful young ayah—or maid—sitting at her feet, and being paddled along by four handsome muscular boatmen. The woman beneath the canopy which had curtains of gauzelike material and cushions of silk, wore heavy make-up, bright red lips, blackened eyes; gold tissue was worked into her expensive clothes, her red-

tipped fingers were flashing with rings, her arms jangling with gold bracelets, whilst round her neck were ropes of pearls; she reeked of scent. As she was helped from her shikara I saw that she was stiff and bent with age. The manji told me later that she was a famous character, having a fabulous fortune which by speculation she had increased ten-fold since the death of the millionaire merchant who had kept her. It was said, but could now never be proved, that she had caused him to send his four wives from the house, and after discovering where his wealth was hidden, had killed him slowly by feeding powdered glass in his favourite cakes which only she could make. But she was now getting near to the age when death overtakes, and of recent years had often repaired to the mosque. At first it had been to the Pathar Masjid, "The woman's Mosque", but one who had wished her ill—it is said one of the wives from whom she had stolen the inheritance—was always waiting at the gate to offer her some of the same kind of cakes in which she had fed their husband the glass. So now her pilgrimage was to Hazrat Bal where, as we followed, we saw she was well received, no doubt paying heavily for such attention when she prayed for her own soul and those of her three sons who had died a year after each other on the even of Id—the great Muslim festival.

The inside of the mosque is heavily decorated with hundreds of coloured glass and brass lamps dripping from the lofty ceiling, and thick Persian carpets covering the entire floor, but none are as beautiful or gorgeous as those in the Shah-i-Hamdan mosque on the Jhelum River. To one side is the famous shrine, the entrance made low so that those who wish to see the hair of the Prophet must go down on their knees to do so. Inside the glass case which is lighted, there are many hanging lamps and coloured globes, on its floor other decorations, but to this day I do not know if it was the hair of the Prophet which was pointed out to me. If so it must have been magnified to account for its being so thick.

Never before have I been so pestered for alms as I was in that one by those who attend in the mosque; having dropped a note into one box, my attention was drawn to another which was for some other "upkeep" and yet another, until finally after giving money to the old man who had looked after our shoes

when we went inside, the "guide", as the priest had now become, pointed out a special box for such gifts, the contents being divided among all those who looked after shoes. It spoilt an otherwise interesting visit; especially when the manji told me afterwards that the attendants at this particular mosque receive a salary from the State, maybe this actually comes from what remained after the new surrounds had been built and the shrine made good, for there were few Muslims in the valley who failed to contribute generously for this work.

Working our way round, by keeping first to the edge of the lake and then through a maze of waterways, we eventually came out to that part of the Dal Lake known as the Cagrabal Lake, having on one side a stone wall covering the Boulevard Road at the lake edge, and on the other rows of houseboats which are as though shunted into small single docks, the verandah ends facing on to the wide clear waterway to the Dal Gate and the Boulevard, the bedrooms protected at the back and sides by narrow strips of land which are covered with overhanging willows. Here I found that whilst we had been away the manji had brought our houseboat and cook boat to a new ghat for a few days, it being a favourite and convenient site for visitors' boats during the spring and autumn weeks when they wish daily to visit the Moghul gardens or swim in one or other of the lakes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Moghul Gardens

THE houseboat had been moved on to the Dal Lake with our intention to make several trips by shikara to the Moghul Gardens, which at one time numbered many dozens, but are now reduced to three, as they were originally made upon its shores, yet the first of these we visited by tonga after being taken over to the other side of the narrow neck of the lake to the Boulevard road by shikara. The Colonel had his pet tonga, one which had, by order, come all the way from the First Bridge to pick us up; after carefully with expert eye examining the horse and telling the tonga wallah that it was not in too bad a condition, he inspected the tonga, making several suggestions to the man and brushing aside his pleas and protests of "I am a poor man, sahib!"; only then did we get in. For short journeys in Srinagar and the surrounding district, to travel by tonga is by far the best, one can see so much more from them, although I have never got used to riding backwards, and still crane my neck to see what is coming ahead.

Chashma Shahi, the little Moghul garden of the Royal Spring, was the one to which we were first going, and we had chosen Monday as the best day, since the crowds of visitors would not be there. We followed the Boulevard round past the European-style houses and private hotels which are backed by the hill surmounted by the Takht-i-Sulaiman, then leaving it, looked across to the rather lovely little house now occupied by the ever-smiling son of the Maharaja Hari Singh, beyond which was the turn of the river on which we had a houseboat ghat. Next, going past the Maharaja's new palace, the one I had gazed down on from the temple, I thought it still looked as much like a barrack even on this closer inspection, for the laid out gardens

before it did not alter my opinion. This building, to know its proper occupants, should be converted into a university, for which it might have been built and is far better suited.

Turning to the other direction there was the lovely Dal Lake of which so much has been written and much will doubtless be for ever told. Large stretches of its still waters are weed-covered but others are free, reflecting the mountains on its clear smooth surface. In the distance is a little summer house with the lotus breeding beds; a causeway reaches out from the mainland and almost touches it. Behind this, making a lovely picture for the artist, is a farmhouse which is a perfect model tucked away between poplars and willows. I imagine it must be occupied by the head mali or gardener, the one who is responsible for cultivating the lotus of the lakes. But the summerhouse might have been lifted out from some Ideal Home Exhibition; it matches perfectly the new Palace and spoils one's immediate rustic vision of Kashmir.

From behind us an open car overflowing with young Indians hooted continually, almost physically forcing our tonga off the road, as the screaming moderns flew past us; they had come up by air from Bombay for the long week-end, a short respite from the glaring lights of the cinema studios, and were dressed in the American fashion, aping the youths of that country, the "boys" sitting on the folded hood wearing dark sun glasses and brightly coloured, gaily patterned silk bush shirts, the "girls" in tight figure-revealing frocks and tresses flowing out behind them. They were thoroughly enjoying themselves, admired by the other young Indians holidaying there, despised and detested by the older ones, who were openly ashamed of them in our presence, even suggesting that they were really Anglo-Indians. They were the same party as occupied the boat adjoining ours and who, watched by a huge crowd of admirers on the Boulevard had, the previous night, played dance records into the small hours, dancing on the brightly lighted flat roof of the houseboat, couples periodically leaving it in a shikara to be paddled out on to the lake for a short while. They had doubtless told their friends that they had come to Kashmir for a quiet rest away from the turmoil of Bombay. Many of them I knew and they cheered us as they passed the tonga, a few of the girls

blowing kisses—although quite proper in Europe and America, far from correct for Indian girls; until recently only "a certain type of girl" would have done so.

We stopped the tonga to allow the road dust to settle and found ourselves on the turn of the road at the foot of the Zeban-wan mountain. The Colonel drew my attention to some mellowed grey ruins standing out on the spur of the mountain above us. These were all that remained of the partly overgrown Pari Mahal, a school of astrology which was built for his tutor, Mulla Shah, by the eldest son of Shah Jahan, Prince Dara Shikoh, who was murdered by his brother. This building was terraced up the hill-side, the face of each of these having deep arches, a favoured Moghul decoration. Now with the typical Kashmiri choice of charming names, it is known as "The Fairies' Palace", and there are few children who do not believe, as do many of their elders, that the fairies of the lakes go there to sleep during the winter when the land is covered by a deep blanket of pure white snow. By the time I had finished that holiday in the valley, I too had joined them in imagining it to be a possibility.

We ran close to the lake again, then at a point where there was a break in the wall so that shikaras could come close for their passengers to disembark, the road branched, and we turned off slightly up hill and inland. Willows, poplars and orchards covered the right side, whilst rice fields spread across the left, the peasant women were bending over and cutting the rice by hand in one field, two small Kashmiri oxen, with the driver standing on the wooden plough to which they were yoked before the humps on their shoulders, were turning over the ground which had been cleared of its crop.

After about a mile we came out under a large modern house, near which a number of soldiers were camped. This is the State guest house for "Very Important Personages" who must be entertained but have a separate establishment run for them, and therefore are unable to be accommodated in the other two State guest houses which contain many suites. It is indeed a wonderful position for any mansion.

And directly behind it, a little to the left, is the lovely little Chashma Shahi garden. It is set on the hillside, the first terrace to the high garden wall entrance having many steps to climb

up, past the masses of flowers planted there, trees overhang the old walls, and here is always to be felt a gentle breeze. At the top we instinctively turned to discover over the rice fields the most enchanting view of the Dal Lake with the Rupa Lank or Silver Island as Char Chinar is sometimes called, this being a tiny island in the middle of the lake with a summerhouse which once had a silver domed roof, and planted with four great chinar trees, all mirrored in the waters. Over to the right and further along the road, were pointed out to me the orchards which had been planted years before with the choicest of fruit trees imported from England by Colonel Anderson. I knew that somewhere among them was the charming little house which he had built and occupied until—so the story goes—he was unwise enough to invite the old Maharaja Pratab Singh to visit it. Then it was a repetition of the story of Naboth's vineyard. Anyway, Anderson left behind him the beginning of what could now be a flourishing fruit industry if only cheaper and easier transportation out of the valley could be made available, for the State is famous for its perfect, luscious fruits.

The Chashma Shahi garden, only about an acre in area, is surrounded by a high wall. The famous spring rises at the south side of the garden, that is, the top end; its water is crystal clear and ice cold, so cold that it is usual to challenge the visitor to hold his hand in it to below the wrist for one minute.

The whole garden has been arranged in three terraces, the spring gushing up into a large stone vase built on the centre of the ground floor hall of the upper pavilion, and surrounded by a white marble screen which also covers it to prevent people from dipping into or washing in it. From this the sparkling water shoots out into a large square tank which is surrounded by pots of the most prolific maidenhair ferns; others suspended above in hanging pots also decorate the place. Continuing on its way the water runs through a carved fountain basin, dashes over a water chute which has its surface serrated and down to the second terrace in the centre of which there is a single fountain. From here it flows on and, as is usual with Moghul pavilions, runs in a channel through the centre of the second summerhouse. Both of these buildings are rather after the Afghan type, being built on old stone foundations; the ends are

open to allow the passage of air thus assisting with the cooling, and as one goes forward to the other side through the arched entrances there still remains in place an old Moghul black marble rail. The lower garden is way down, the glistening water cascading over a narrow chute which drops it some twenty feet into this garden in the centre of which is a tank with five fountain jets.

Emerald green lawns of velvet soft turf, which are always in the same perfect condition, are broken up in patterns by flower beds of all shapes and sizes; never can one find one which is not a mass of bloom, whilst the high mud and brick walls, with iris planted on the top of them, are almost hidden by flowering shrubs and fruit trees.

The design of a central watercourse flowing down through formal terraced gardens was favoured by the Moghuls. In Kashmir they had the advantage of being able to build them down from a spring or stream, yet in the plains they still had such gardens, the fountains and channels being occasionally fed from a distant river, brought for miles, though more often supplied by water which was drawn the day through from a well just outside the garden wall and fed by leather bags into a large supply tank.

Pavilions which were open on all sides were also a feature, the water either flowing round them, with fountains which were themselves in the water spraying more into the air, or others with it passing in channels through the centre of the pavilion, sometimes over marble serrated sloping slabs, a few that were inside buildings being made up of layers of pearl oyster shells, giving the appearance of waves and upon its leaving the building, forming a waterfall to the tank below, the wall over which it fell having rows of small compartments, honeycomb fashion in which lights were placed at night and bunches of flowers by day, so decorating the gardens. And with the many fountains and the gentle flow of air passing over the clear ice-cold spring waters, the rooms were cooled; sometimes scented by the blossoms of jasmin and roses scattered on the surface as it left the bubbling spring.

The pavilions, some built of marble, some of stone, some of wood, all had cool marble floors, carved posts upheld the roof,

which together with the ceilings and walls were decorated in bright colours and lovely designs, the pure white plaster being made of crushed marble. Small retiring rooms were set in the corners, and many of the larger pavilions had upper stories, strangely enough usually led up to from the outside by narrow and steep stairways, the first floor usually having a central open room with smaller ones off from it; maybe these were used by the men, the lower room by the women. During the wet seasons the openings would be covered by beautifully worked curtains. Kitchens are not to be found, which suggests that these must have been outside the walls of the gardens, the scent of which was not spoiled by the aromas coming from the highly spiced dishes beloved by the Indians, aromas which although often noticeable during the cooking, are no indication of the flavour, much as is the case with many of the European cheeses.

It is questionable as to whether the gardens were used by the Emperors and their Court during the colder months, for one reads that they came to Kashmir from the scorching plains for the summer months. The whole of the court could not be moved from Delhi or Lahore though, and a few remained in those cities though most of them went towards the hills with the Emperor and the Empress and then remained on the other side of the pass—the wrong side—only the principal members continuing the whole way, since to move a complete court each year would have been a heavy drain on the treasury. There would however have been the rains of July to contend with, the ideal months in the valley being May and June, September and October.

We left the little gem of a Moghul garden Chashma Shahi, by a doorway which led through the side wall. Here we discovered a tree-shaded square framed in by stonework at ground level. It might have been the foundation of some demolished building, but I doubt it for the surface of the stones was both level and smooth. It could also have been, and probably was, a portion set aside outside the garden as a kitchen, for nearby flowed a little stream.

Followed by the tonga we walked down the hill on the grass roadside which was good to step on; the breeze which could not get within the walled garden now reaching us, the view before

us was quiet and peaceful, the still waters of the lake only disturbed by an odd shikara as it moved through, leaving an ever-spreading, feather-like wake. As we passed them we saw that the smaller trees protected by the tall poplars were cherry—I remembered that Abul Fazal, a scholar in the court of the Moghul Emperor Akbar, mentioned these particular trees and their rich red fruits in *Ain-i-Akbari*, his biographical chronicle of that Emperor's reign; the women were still bending down and reaping the rice, the tiny baby of one was crying under the shade of an earth bank, but none took any notice; the man was still standing on his wooden plough, adding his weight in order to drive the blade deeper into the good rich earth, whilst the little dun bulls continued up and down the field; his shouts to them were much like a song—he was probably telling them how wonderfully their fathers had worked for his father, for he had no need to lift a stick to drive them on as did the tonga wallahs to their ponies.

We returned to lunch on the houseboat; all was quiet in the one next to us, for the bright young things had left to catch the mid-day 'plane south, all that remained were two of their number, a "play back" artist and her brother. That afternoon seeing them taking tea on their roof garden I could quite understand why the young woman could only be heard and not seen on the screen, for even the most clever of make-up artists could never have hidden the deep pock-marks on an otherwise clear-cut lovely face. Why is it that those who are marked for life by such a disfigurement usually have really beautiful or handsome features?

That evening after dinner, the moon being at the full, we called for the shikara, and ordered the men to paddle slowly out on to the lake. The snow-capped mountain tops had become silver, the slopes deep purple, the waters of the lake reflecting all the colours but basically green, much like the Alexandrine the jeweller had only that afternoon tried to sell me, insisting that I test its quality by taking it to a dark corner to watch the purple change to emerald.

Very occasionally we heard the splash of another shikara's paddle, but otherwise all was quiet except for the cry of a night bird. It was perfect peace, the water and the air still, silent and

smooth. Then in the distance we heard singing, not the loud notes of a gramophone, not the chorus of a party, just the pure crystal notes of a girl's voice accompanied by the occasional blending chords of a string instrument.

We ordered the men to quietly glide towards the place from where the sound was coming and as we got nearer saw one or two other shikaras silently joining us. Then silhouetted against the background we picked out the Silver Island with its four great chinar trees shading a once marble, silver domed pavilion, this, now gone, has built upon its foundation an ugly edifice best called a shelter, but in the moonlight again becoming a lovely jewel. From here the liquid voice was flowing; drawn towards it, we felt almost ashamed to encroach. In a whisper the Colonel told me the songs were old Kashmiri ones then being sung on the island as doubtless they had been hundreds of years before.

We could make out the singer standing leaning against one of the pillars of the summerhouse and looking towards the moon; behind her on the ground sat another figure, a man playing a sitar, a large, long-necked, mandolin-like wire-strung instrument which, plucked with a plectrum, has the quality, at the will of the player, of harp, guitar or viola. No one spoke in the shikaras, none applauded when the girl had finished her song; all of us must have been carried away and lost in admiration at the beauteous quality of the smooth notes which were as though wafted on the surface of the waters by the cool breeze then just lightly rustling the leaves of the overhanging trees.

The moon slowly slipped behind a feathery cloud, the picture on the Silver Island was lost for a while, but the songs went on; then as the moon again appeared it was brighter and I saw the girl was the one who was living on the houseboat next to ours, the musician her brother. In that kindly light her pock marks were lost, all that we saw was a lovely, perfect figure in a glittering sari, the beauty of the picture being completed by the exquisite voice and the scent from the flowering shrubs blooming round the summerhouse. It is a scene I shall ever remember, and at times as I hear that same voice singing on records the latest modern westernized Indian film songs, I wonder if her

fans have ever known how she can so softly and sympathetically sing the sweet love songs of her motherland.

Later, when she knew me better, she told me that her mother had been a Kashmiri singer, as also had her grandmother before her, and even further back; how as a small child her mother had brought her to Kashmir, sung to her on that same island and told her that her great-grandmother had sung there for the Emperor and his Empress. The story which had passed down was probably true, for the daughters of singers and dancers usually inherited their mothers' beauty and qualities. As the years passed, the beauty of the daughters became enhanced by the high breed blood of their fathers, for most became courtesans or the concubines of rich men and princes, so that in this age they have lost all trace of the peasant and become ladies of quality with graceful, natural movement as dancers, and clear musical voices as singers.

Next morning I awoke to look out from my bedroom window on to the willow bank alongside. I saw our boatmen's women were preparing the scarlet chillies which had festooned the boat for days, drying. These they pounded into powder in the mortar, then taking it out they handed it to the old mother who sifted it, the red powder passing through the criss-cross cane, the yellow seeds and coarser stalks remaining. The powder mixed with water into a mudlike state is then made into round bricks, dried and stored away to hot up the Kashmiri food during the winter months.

The bird life in that part was very alive; a pair of black and white wagtails were busy on the mud banks; when they came close I saw that the black was really a greyish green; it seemed that there must have been hundreds of the tiny insects on which they lived on that damp mud bank; the bird's slim, clean-cut tails bobbing up and down as they searched for them. A magpie settled on the branch of a willow in the distance, forcing me to get up from my bed, for I had to look out for its mate, since I could not start the day with bad luck after seeing one lone magpie—a belief which I found was shared by Kashmiris. A pair of bulbuls flew round. The size of thrushes, they are a dark greyish-brown with black feathers on the throat and the sides of the neck, white-tipped tails, yellowish feathers under, and

white-checked, black-crested heads. This crest, which is bent forward, makes it appear as though the bird is wearing a high hat. Theirs is a pretty little note, a sweet twitter or warbling, hardly a song though. They keep as close to each other as the proverbial love birds; the boatman declared that they must have Hindu blood in them since they mate for life for, unlike the Muslim, with the Hindu there is no divorce. They are supposed to bring good fortune.

One old English lady who had made Srinagar her home and who is a great bird lover, had trained them to come into her houseboat, there to perch on the backs of the chairs. I remember when taking a "dish of tea" with her on the first occasion, being suddenly surprised as I put my cup down on the tea table, by one, on seeing that it was empty, flying forward and after a second or two fluttering over it gently landing on the edge, its wings still moving so that the delicate cup did not tip as the bird dipped its head in to search for any sugar that might have settled there—they love sugar. Then to complete their tricks, the old lady threw them crumbs, few of which they missed. She told me their eggs are pale shell pink with red spots. In parts of India these birds are trapped and, with a piece of string tied round the leg, trained for fighting, and I was assured by a friend I have no reason to doubt, that one such famous fighting bulbul had been sold in the early part of the season for five hundred rupees. The birds are not kept in cages, but attached to a perch by the leg with a very thin wire chain and carried about.

That day we took the manji, the bearer and the luncheon baskets and set off for the Shalimar Gardens by water. Can there by anyone in the world who has not heard of this lovely place, even though it be but in the *Indian Love Lyrics* written years ago by Amy Woodford Findon—"Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar"? And Shalimar means "The Abode of Love" in Sanskrit, though one writer insists the word divided comes from "shali", a mountain, and "mar", beautiful.

The trip to it was full of interest, taking at leisure nearly two hours through weed-choked canals and winding waterways, with dab-chicks, moor-hens and reed-warblers skimming away across the open lake, where one's interest is drawn to the little fishes which dart everywhere amongst the feathery, multicoloured

weeds which grow up from the bottom of the lake, the water as clear as air.. We came upon fishermen; some were standing up at the end of their shikaras holding aloft long poles with five spikes, rose fashion, on the end. They stand motionless, their eyes glued on the still water below them; suddenly they thrust the pole down, and lifting it look round to see if a visitor is watching, then display their catch which is usually a fish the size of a herring; when we showed interest the fisherman bent down and held up his morning's catch, some seven fishes, the largest of which must have weighed four pounds. We came on another; at first I thought the shikara had drifted away empty, for it was in a part where the lake had much weed, then I saw a heap of weed at one end with a fishing pole sticking up from it. The fisherman who was lying at the stern of the boat, had covered himself with large Euryale ferox leaves some three feet across, which also extended over his head and shaded the water beneath him, he held ready-poised the same kind of fishing pole, but although we stood by for some time he caught nothing and I doubt whether he ever knew that we had been there.

At exactly eleven o'clock, as we were admiring the perfect reflection of the mountains on the lake's surface, one which always causes the photographer to wonder which way up the print should be, cups of hot morning coffee were handed over to us, not from a thermos, but freshly made, for in the back of the boat the little charcoal stove had been lighted, the water boiled as we went along, and the coffee made.

We began to get nearer to the shore and the great bank of chinar trees. The lake was matted with weeds, the channel between them so narrow that it was difficult for two shikaras to pass with ease, and so shallow that the men gave up using paddles and took to poling. The mud they disturbed was not of a very pleasant odour, it reminded one of the finish of the annual clean out of the garden gold-fish pond. At a distance, standing as though stuffed, were a pair of herons.

I then saw that we had arrived between two earth banks and knew that we were entering the mile-long canal which runs through the swamps to the gardens. As we got nearer, willow trees were growing on the banks, there was an untidy and dirty little hamlet, and closer still to the land, great old chinars stood

back and extended their giant branches. But the water was low and we had to walk the last quarter of a mile to the entrance pavilion in front of which ran the road. A few tongas and old taxis stood nearby; so far I was not very impressed by Shalimar, the last mile of it having spoilt the journey over the lake.

When the garden was originally made it ran right down to the canal which was then doubtless kept clear and clean. It is unfortunate that the road must now run where it does, or that some other layout could not have been designed for it so that although not in the garden it was of it, for having passed through the gates one's breath is taken for a minute at the most amazing mass of colours of the flowers, the perfectly kept lawns, the chinars just changing to orange, and if the visitor is fortunate as we were, he is greeted by the sparkling streams and gushing fountains. It is indeed a paradise on earth, perhaps made the more so because of the contrasting last mile of the journey to it.

Like all the Moghul gardens in Kashmir, the watercourse runs down the centre of the garden for its full terraced length, the crystal clear water glittering like silver as it races over marble, fish-scaled shoots, down in a waterfall before carved decorated marble slabs, the channel so wide in parts that stepping stones were placed across it, and here and there are slabs on which the Emperor sat enthroned with the cool water flowing beneath him that he might be refreshed.

Legend tells that the King Pravarasena II, the founder of Srinagar who used to visit a saint named Sukarma Swami whose abode was near to Harwan, had a villa built on the site of the Shalimar garden, so that he might rest there the night. The villa and its garden fell into decay and vanished, but the small village, which had as is usual sprung up around its walls, remained, retaining for itself the name of Shalimar.

On this site the Emperor Jehangir had laid out the garden which is still there, now far more lovely than in his day, for the giant chinar trees since planted, have now reached maturity. The pavilions may have lost some of their freshness, the watercourses become mellowed by age, but the great stone, ten foot high wall which surrounds the whole place is unbroken, the

mountains which form a perfect background are the same, as is the cool water which keeps fresh the gardens in all their colourful glory, and so it has been for well over three hundred years, for it was laid out by the Emperor Jehangir in 1619. This original garden he called "Forhatbakhsh", which means "Delightful". In 1630 Zafar Khan the then Moghul Governor of Kashmir, added a portion to the north of the garden and named that part "Faiz-Bakhsh", meaning "Bountiful".

According to an old guidebook the Shalimar—in this book the name is spelt Shalamar—is five hundred and ninety yards long, at the lower end two hundred and seven yards wide, and at the upper end two hundred and sixty-seven yards wide; the watercourse which runs right through and joins the canal outside, being eighteen inches deep and from nine to fourteen yards wide.

The water comes from the Harwan stream from behind the great garden, and according to this book the canals as well as the tanks were lined with polished limestone resembling black marble. Now the bottoms of the main channels are carpeted with short bright green grass; the tanks remain as before, with cascades, some short and shallow, others long and steep, all highly polished by age—and by the small sons of visitors, whom the gardeners dare not check, using them as slides when the water is not flowing.

There are four terraces to Shalimar, which as a royal garden is divided into three portions, the entrance from the canal and the road leading to the public garden which terminates with the first large central pavilion known as the Diwan-i-Am. The stream of water flows down through the building, which has rooms on either side, into a tank; above the waterfall is still to be seen the black marble throne on which the Moghul Emperor used to be seated cross-legged in this Hall of Public Audience when at certain times the garden was thrown open to enable the people to see their ruler.

We walked up one of the tree-shaded, wide, soft, grass paths which run on each side of the tank, to the second garden which is known as the Emperor's Garden and consists of two shallow terraces. In the middle of this and just above where the second terrace is formed are the carved foundation stones of what was

the Diwan-i-Khas—the Hall of Private Audience—and over to the left by the north-west wall were the royal bathrooms.

Continuing still further up we came upon the two small Kashmiri-style guard rooms built on the old stone bases and set as a gateway through the wall to the fourth terrace above, this being laid out as the Ladies' Garden which is the most lovely of them all, and the one for which Shalimar is most famed.

The centrepiece of this glorious garden is the beautiful black marble pavilion which was built by Shah Jahan, standing as then in the mist of a large square shallow tank from which one hundred and forty fountains play; on the surface then floated white and cream water lilies, pink lotus and mauve water hyacinths, while jasmin bushes adorned the corners, the whole being shaded by old cypress trees. The magnificent pavilion which is raised on a platform about three feet above the garden is about sixty-five feet square, its sloping roof being supported on each side by a row of six polygonal-shaped and elaborately fluted black marble pillars. It was used as a banqueting hall and a place for entertainment. One writer of old says that the tank was floored with blue-green Persian tiles, at evening parties coloured lamps were placed cunningly so that they shed their lights to make the fountains and cascades appear in differing colours, golden fishes with jewelled eyes floated in the tank, silver frogs were suspended on the surface so that they croaked with the movement of the water. It is said that these used to be hidden in some secret place in the garden, after each party by the head gardener, but he suddenly died and none have been able to discover where they were buried. Nightingales in cages were placed in the trees and fed on a seed which gave them song; they died before the light.

Channels of water ran out at right angles from the pavilion towards others set in the walls of the garden, the whole forming a cross of glittering water on this upper terrace, all framed by beds of multicoloured flowers, the four corners being spread with soft green lawns on which strutted proud peacocks brought from Delhi. Shaded by fruit trees, in spring the colours of their blossoms added to the fresh coolness of the garden, in later seasons their bright luscious fruits at hand to be enjoyed

by those upon whom fortune had smiled and permitted to enter within the high protecting walls.

The bearer followed by a troop of porters, each carrying as little as they could in order that as many as possible might earn a few annas, arrived with all the baskets and pots, the brazier and even an ice box which we had brought. This for a lunch for two; and one would have thought the load heavy from the way the porters lifted each to the ground. The bearer told them to go off and come when called to collect the baskets for return; only then would he permit us to pay them.

A durri—a coarse sort of carpet—was laid out on the grass, the bearer disappeared into a hollow and lighted the fire for we must at least start and finish the meal with something hot, even though we had insisted on a cold lunch. So while he heated up the soup, we opened the ice box to extract lager—which we had seen from a notice board at the gate, together with dogs, was not permitted entrance by order of the Maharaja, but it was too late now and we agreed that it was best to get rid of the stuff before it caused the Maharaja any further embarrassment.

Just at that time we saw our houseboat neighbours coming up to the garden, they also were followed by a string of porters; we lunched together, we on European fare, eating cold duck whole like Henry the Eighth and tomatoes and cucumber like apples, they on curried puffs, but aiding and abetting us in breaking the law by helping us to empty the ice box. Then on to the coffee, large cups floating with rich cream, and my introduction by our lady guest to its being sweetened with Kashmir honey, which I must admit does enhance the flavour considerably.

A mali or gardener came towards us; at first I thought it was to check on the ice box, but it was merely the usual presentation of a button-hole from the garden, then a respectful standing back until one produced the expected annas as a gratuity. Mine must have been larger than usual, for to the delight of the lady, he offered to her a large bouquet of giant zinnias as we later left the garden.

As we sat there after lunch the girl brought before us a picture of life as it had been in the garden back in Moghul days, a picture built up from the stories her mother and her grandmother

had told her and which had been passed down to them through a line of women, for fathers and grandfathers were never mentioned—were probably unknown. As she talked on to me, leaning against a peach tree in a half-asleep state, it was as if it was all happening again; the wonderful costumes of the men of those far off days; high turbans set with great jewels and surmounted with a larger stone or a wondrous feather, long coats which reached from neck to knee, embroidered in many colours on a base of silver or gold thread, tight fitting trousers of the same metal thread, slippers—Persian style—with curled over tips, again of gold and set with colours; the women also wearing loose fitting shalwars—pyjama-like trousers—of precious silks, long smock-like jackets of the softest and thinnest materials, heavy jewels round their necks and wrists, with some who came from other parts displaying saris of gossamer silk from Dacca which by their cunning wearing perfectly shaped their rounded figures.

The musicians—some six or eight of them—would take up their position to one side of the pavilion and after a while the dancers would appear—Tavayaf girls, or Nautch girls as the Anglo-Indians always called them—many only just having reached the age of maturity and in the first flush of youthful beauty, others experienced dancers with figures rounded and narrowed to perfection by constant massaging with scented oils, every movement studied, complete and faultless. The costumes were colourful and teasingly slightly transparent, a tight fitting V neck and long sleeved bodice, a floor length, gold-edged, very full skirt of contrasting shade or colour dropping like a shimmering waterfall from the waist, a finely spun head veil held in place by a glittering head-piece which dropped over the forehead, the veil falling almost to the ground and sparkling with tiny stars, each shiver exaggerated by the clatter of bracelets or the tinkle of ankle bells, the dancer with downcast eyes holding the veil modestly across her face; the wives of the men who were watching, unmoved by their husband's obvious and unashamed interest in a particular girl, being fully aware as to what could and probably would happen after the party, and hoping that it would be the usual temporary infatuation.

The singers, more dignified, wore lovely gowns less reveal-

ing, the heavy silken skirts streaming from waist-belts made of gold and set with precious stones; ropes of pearls and strings of jewels adorned their lovely necks. Always they told of birds and flowers and love as they sang. Some perfected the song with a little acting and with a graceful modest dance, and because few of them wore anklets or bracelets, one at least, the ancestor of the girl who was then describing the scene, held in each of her open palms a golden bell. For a discreetly dropped reward, a string of pearls, a precious jewel maybe, they would recite or sing the words and music of some song a conceited member of the Court, who thought himself to be a composer and a poet, had written in order to flatter his Emperor, or even his loved one who was present.

As the night progressed, by the light of the stars and crescent moon—always a sign of good fortune—although the dancers and singers did not mix with the invited guests, on some pretext the men would slip away, knowing where to find them with the help of a faithful and well-rewarded servant whose duty it was to see that his master was always kept happy.

The next morning when the sun was getting high in the sky the ladies would awaken; women servants looking as fresh as the dawn would bring them cooling refreshment and the tired, crushed and faded dancing girls would have disappeared to some corner pavilion to sleep the day through. There would be no sign of a man within the garden, for even the malis would have done their work and left with the rising of the sun. This then was the picture painted by one who had heard it proudly passed down from one Tavayaf girl to another.

We walked down to the gate together, parting there with the brother and sister, for they had come by tonga, and we went on to where the shikara was awaiting us. The baskets and other things had been loaded, the manji had handed the porters their pay, but they still stood awaiting us. Immediately upon our arrival they as usual protested that the manji had not given them sufficient; the manji became furious, there was a terrific row, which could have been settled for a few annas, but the manji refused to allow us to do this. In the end, against his advice, I gave each of the porters two annas extra and they went off grinning and happy with the manji swearing that he would

never again allow one of his sahibs to employ them as porters. He had lost face and was very annoyed with me. This sort of thing is quite usual up there though, for the amounts laid down for porters, hire of shikara and tongas were far too low—these men expect, and deserve a tip.

Silently for a while we were paddled down the canal or rather the cleared patch between the mud banks, then out on to the open lake. We were making for Nasim Bagh, which is but a few miles along the lake side from Shalimar, but the dense water weeds forced one to go well out into the lake to find clear water.

Ahead we could see the hundreds of chinar trees which still remain of the twelve hundred which the Emperor Shah Jahan had planted there in his Garden of the Breeze, which its name Nasim Bagh means. As we came upon it we could see about a dozen houseboats moored there. Now no longer the laid out garden that the Emperor had made with pavilions, water chutes, fountains and channels, it has become a delightful camping ground; in a short while you find yourself looking round for the deer, since it is like some lovely old park with the grass soft and green and the trees aged and beautiful. The old walls which surrounded it have long since disappeared, leaving just a few mounds as signs of their existence and of the original terraces.

The view from under the trees, across the blue-green reflecting expanse of the lake and dull rust of those parts which are covered by weed, way on to the multicoloured mountains on the other side of the Dal Lake is truly enchanting in its beauty. And the cool breeze which gave it its charming name, still moves at all times lightly through the chinars as it did in the days of the prince who chose this place for his garden, although the chinar trees would not have been planted until the garden was maturing since it is said that Ali Mardan Khan, who came after that time, first introduced them into Kashmir, making them royal trees which could not be cut down without the permission of the ruler, a law which remains and is enforced to this day. Many are the gardens like Nasim, though smaller, to be found round the borders of the lovely lake. All that now remains of them may be a terrace, a broken wall, a pavilion foundation, not unusually incorporated into some farm building or farmyard, the water-

course being used as a dhobi ghat—the place where clothes are washed—the pavilion base now the foundation for a barn.

We sat under the chinars and looked across the lake past the few houseboats and tents of visitors. It was strange that not until then did I realize how museum-like the Shalimar garden had been, as though all the time I was conscious of the watching spirits of those who had originally made it or walked there.

In Nasim all was so different, there was a feeling of complete unfettered freedom in this place of quiet charm and natural beauty where one could meditate undisturbed; the young man build his castles, the old man happily hover over the past, the poet write his ode, the artist paint her picture, the musician compose his score in tune with the cooing of the doves or nightingales, the dancer build her movement to match the flickering of the leaves and the gentle caress of the limpid waters of the lake upon its bank, on which in places grew masses of forget-me-nots, behind which was a tiny cornfield blood-red with poppy and scented with wild thyme and water mint. Indeed a quiet abode for lovers who in that lovely haven would already be half way to paradise.

The bearer had brought us tea which he had prepared on the lakeside, and sandwiches which were as fresh as the tea, and with him came flocks of little birds, so used were they to picnickers. When he had gone, we watched him in the distance join a circle with the shikara wallahs who also were having tea, but theirs had been prepared from green tea; instead of sugar, salt had been added, the whole served with bread in a small glazed earthenware bowl—the Kashmiri dish of tea—the result was a sloppy pink mess, which, after noisily drinking the liquid, they scooped up with their fingers. Their tea had not been prepared fresh like ours, it had been brewing for some hours in a samovar, which is a teapot-cum-kettle-cum-stove, for the kettle has a stand fixed beneath it. Up through the centre of the container there is a pipe in which red hot charcoal is placed. The tea is put in the water and stews for as long as the charcoal remains alive.

We returned to the houseboat just as night was falling. The noises of the day had worn themselves down, as yet it was too early for the night calls of birds and frogs, so that as we moved

slowly over the water there was just the musical sound of the dip of the paddles, and the bubble of water as one after the other bearer, manji and boatmen drew a whiff or two of smoke from the hubble-bubble, the pipe which is ages old, the tobacco and burning charcoal container being at the end of a tube which passing down into the water of the bottle-like bowl cleans the smoke before it is inhaled up the mouthpiece tube. There came to us also the soft singing of the youngest member of the crew, a boy of about thirteen whose voice had not yet broken; it seemed a pity that one day it must do so.

Nishat Bagh, a name which means "The Garden of Delight", was the last of the Moghul gardens we had to visit on the Dal Lake. This was made in about A.D. 1630, some writers say by the brother, others the father of Nur Jehan, the Queen of Jehangir.

Again we went by water which is amazingly clear in parts, being mainly fed by springs. We made towards an enclosed portion of the lake, entering under a long arched bridge around the buttresses of which we looked down on hundreds of small fish three or four inches long; inside, the weed was again choking part of the lake, but a way was clear through to the steps below the entrance to the gardens. Here also the lowest terrace of all has now disappeared for the road runs where this once was laid between the lake and the garden wall.

We climbed a few high stone steps and entered Nishat by one of the twin covered garden gates. The first terrace was a blaze of colour, the beds at the outer edge being filled with large zinnias of many shades, cosmos and flowering shrubs, and the beds on the lawns were massed with geraniums and asters. The purple Persian lilac hedges are famous for their beauty and scent. In the centre of this, originally the second terrace, there is a great tank which is well over a hundred feet in length on all sides, about three feet deep and with twenty-five fountains then playing, and as we stood the sunrays caught the spray which formed many rainbows. Water is always running through the gardens to feed the beds of flowers, only on Sundays and special occasions is it diverted to the central stone or marble lined streams.

The two-storied pavilion which is directly above this is built

after the Kashmir style, of wood—painted a drab red—and plaster, on a stone foundation. In the middle of the ground floor, which is known as the Fountain Hall, is a reservoir about fourteen feet square and again three feet deep; in this five fountains play. Two sides of the pavilion have rather lovely lattice windows, one looking back on the garden, the other over the lake, decorated carved pillars run from floor to ceiling, these together with a kind of upper screen are painted in reds, blues and yellows and make their contribution to the charm of the stone-floored hall which is cooled by the spraying waters.

The upper storey has one large lattice-screened room on the north side and a smaller one on the south. An opening in the floor which is quite large—almost thirty feet square—affords a view of the fountains below, the idea doubtless being that they would also cool the upper portion of this summer pavilion.

There were twelve terraces in the garden the whole being entirely surrounded by a high wall which, the guide books say, "encloses a garden now five hundred and ninety-five yards long and three hundred and sixty wide". This being a private and not a royal garden, it is only divided into two, with the main part containing the many terraces separated from the upper zenana terrace by a wall eighteen feet high running the full width. Each end of this wall is flanked by an octagonal tower with a stairway inside leading to the upper garden.

The pavilion on the zenana terrace is also a double-storied building—really two of them connected by an archway across the canal as the water enters the garden. On this terrace are planted dozens of chinar trees, now so large that their branches form for it a flickering, leafy ceiling. Here we found sitting a very old white-bearded musician who, immediately his dim eyes made out who we were, started strumming on his lute-like instrument and singing—completely out of tune—"God save the King". We sat down and talked to him; then the Colonel, who had found some sort of tie-up with the old fellow's sons and his own regiment, asked him to sing us one of the Kashmiri songs he knew. It was interesting to hear, though badly sung by a frail croaky old voice, but he was more than happy to have someone ask him to sing, flattered that our interest in him had brought many other visitors to stand and listen, and nearly

overcome by the two silver rupees we gave him for his services.

The terrace below this has a terrific reservoir one hundred and two feet wide, one hundred and twenty-three feet long and three feet deep, and containing twenty-five spurting fountains.

Standing on these higher terraces and looking down on the others with their flower beds perfectly set in soft green lawns and the glistening water streaming down the centre, one is reminded of a giant carpet, with all colours blending, yet taking each separately they clash, such is the value of green, the basic colour which all the colours seem to accept. Maybe it is because we have become used to the always green leaves of the flowers whatever their colour, that our eyes have become attuned to it.

We sat under the shade of a giant of the chinars and the bearer brought us tea. So unlike other parts when, at his arrival we should have been surrounded by small boys or just interested spectators, there were none who came close or even looked in our direction, for it seemed that all were picnicking. Just a few birds fluttered close, but those of which we saw most in the garden, took no notice, for I have never seen so many hoopoes walking about and plunging their long slender curved bills into the earth to extract the insects on which they live, as I did on the close mown lawns of Nishat. These strangely beautiful birds, about the size of a thrush, are most picturesque, their colouring reminding one of a wasp, their heads and bodies being sand colour, the wings and tail black with stripes of white across them, but the most striking feature is the bird's crest, each feather of which is sand colour tipped with black. As the hoopoe walks about, this crest is folded down, standing out at the back of the head and almost matching the beak in size and shape, but when the bird alights from flight, or when it is surprised, the crest expands fan-like rather as a cockatoo does and is then strikingly beautiful. The note they make is soft and musical—ook, ook, ook—and the Muslim head gardener who came to pay his respects, followed by his son who presented the usual button-hole, declared that although small, the flesh of the hoopoe is very good to eat, especially so for invalids and old people. The bird's scatterbrained nest is as untidy and ill-made as that of the pigeon, and once the hen bird is on her eggs, her partner will not permit her to leave them, feeding her there, so

that by the time the chicks hatch out the nest is shockingly befouled.

The birds for which the gardens are most famous though are the minivets, which flutter about in flocks among the topmost branches of the trees searching for the little insects on which they live. Their winters are spent in Ceylon, their summers, which are their mating seasons, in Kashmir, and Nishat has long been their favourite place when the flocks split up into pairs. After that as the season advances, one often sees one cock with five or six hens. Smaller than a sparrow, the cock has a bright red breast and some red also on the tail and wings; very prettily they flit and flutter among the trees, displaying their colours to the greatest advantage and uttering a low sort of note. The delicate little nests, one of which we were shown, is as delightful and neat as the birds themselves. They must take some considerable time to build for they consist of the smallest twigs, moss and hair, all beautifully bound together with spiders' webs, so made that in their colouring they match the branch of the tree, on the bark of which they seem to have grown.

The channel of water which runs the full length of the garden has fountains playing at intervals and as it flows from one terrace to another it rushes over serrated and scalloped chutes, some of these being eighteen feet high, and bridging most of these is a stone slab throne. From here one can look down on the lower pavilion, past it to the Dal Lake beyond with the bridge under which we entered that part, and away in the distance to the old Fort. On a day when the air is clear, there can be seen far away snow-topped mountains which encompass the valley.

There is a famous story of these gardens which is doubtless true for its writers have always told the same. The water coming into Nishat is taken from the same stream as feeds the Shalimar. The garden was barely completed before the Emperor Shah Jahan visited it, and so much admired this new garden which his Prime Minister had built, that he decided that it must become a royal one. Accordingly he pointedly congratulated Asaf Khan on his work on three occasions during one visit. By all the unwritten laws between kings and subjects, the garden should then have been offered to the Emperor, but the Prime Minister

remained silent. This so much displeased His Royal Highness, that although Asaf Khan was too valuable for him to dismiss, to spite him he ordered that the water of the stream should only supply the Shalimar.

Immediately this happened Nishat was shorn of its real beauty, as only those who have visited such gardens with stone pools and fountains which are left dry will appreciate, but although closely related to the Emperor, the Prime Minister could do nothing.

He went to his garden, saw how the lovely flowers were now drooping for want of the water that gave them life, and miserably unhappy lay down on the grass close to one of the dry stone tanks, soon falling asleep. A faithful servant, who like all the others of his household knew of the reason for their master's grief, then sought out the place where the stream had been blocked, and removed the great stone plug. Asaf Khan was awakened by the sound of water playing from the fountains into the pools and rippling over the cascades, and leapt to his feet delighted though confused, but on hearing the confession of the old retainer he insisted that the stream be immediately blocked again. It was too late though, for the Emperor had heard of what had happened and ordered that the servant be brought before him. The wretched man was dragged in front of the throne, but showing not the slightest fear stood as a dutiful subject with feet together and hands clasped loosely before him and admitted that he was guilty of the offence, but explained that he only did what any servant who loved his master would have done when he could no longer bear to see him so utterly miserable. Now that he had seen his master happy once again, if maybe only for a short time, he would willingly submit to any punishment that the Emperor deemed fitted to the crime. There was a hushed silence over those who had assembled; some no doubt wondered if the Prime Minister would now dare to plead his servant's cause, but instead of hearing the Emperor award one of the ghastly sentences that he might have done, they saw him call the man forward so that he could bestow a *khilat*—robe of honour—upon him, at the same time granting to his master Asaf Khan a *sanad* which gave him the right to drain water for all time to Nishat Bagh from the Shalimar stream.

Later we went to see the two other famous Moghul landscape features, the Achabal Gardens and the spring of Verinag, neither of which are fed from a stream, but by gushing springs, their volume of water so great that the explanation that in both cases they are really the spots where underground rivers burst forth from the limestone is acceptable. That which floods from the spring at Verinag is caught in a great stone octagonal tank of considerable depth and eighty feet across. This is surrounded by an old and massive stone wall with arched recesses which, when reflected on the waters, changes them to a deep indigo, while in those places which catch the sun, the surface is the colour of turquoise, and where there is no shadow or sun's rays, it remains an amethyst. In the autumn when the trees surround-in the pool cast their reflection, their golden tint is caught on the rippled surface as sacred silver fish rise to feed from the hands of Brahmin priests who come there morning and evening to feed them and recite their mantras by the waters of the sacred tank.

The great limestone tank is sixteen miles from Islamabad on the road to Jammu, close to the foot of the Banihal Pass, and lies below a range of thickly wooded hills. It was built in 1620 by the Emperor Jehangir. Seven years later his son Shah Jahan who was also a great lover of the beauty of nature, had wonderful gardens laid out round it with aqueducts, cascades and fountains; these are now in ruins and overgrown, though just as the gardens by the Dal Lake are famed for their cherries to this day, so is Verinag known for its delicious apples. It is said that within the gardens was built at that time a gallery, the walls of which were covered with pictures which were actually painted there.

Verinag is claimed as the true source of the great river Jhelum, the many streams which it joins being only its tributaries. In the heat of the summer it is the coolest of all the gardens. I could so very easily picture those who went there to laze away the day reclining on carpets by the great pool and occasionally dipping their hands into the cold waters shaded by the great trees surrounding it.

There are many who declare that it was to this cool garden which he so loved, that the Emperor Jehangir asked to be

carried to die; this could not be, and he died on the journey to Lahore, near the Moghul mosque in Chingas Sarai, which is on the right bank of the Tawi river and on the old Bhimbar road out of Kashmir. Yet his wish was to an extent granted, since his heart lies buried next to the mosque; it was only possible to carry the casket of his body on the rest of the long journey through the hot plains from Kashmir.

Seven miles from Islamabad are the Achabal Gardens, laid out in 1640 by Jahan-ara, the daughter of Shah Jahan and said to have been that Emperor's favourite pleasure resort. Like those of the lake it is built on a gentle slope, behind it the firs which cover the mountain side enhance its beauty, whilst glorious chinars grow throughout the gardens to shade its lawns. The spring which bursts from the hillside, Bernier, who was there in the latter half of the fifteenth century, refers to as a river, and it is believed by many to be the river Brang, which disappears into the fissures of limestone at Dewalgam, coming to the surface again. The stone waterways, mellowed by age, still remain, as does also the great waterfall which Bernier mentions as having seen with lights set at night behind its generous flow. The chinars then planted are massive, the lawns are like bowling greens, fresh and without a weed and the flower beds ever a blaze of brilliant colour.

The original buildings fell into decay and were replaced on their old foundations by others in the Kashmiri style during the reign of the Maharaja Rambir Singh. Many consider that in so doing he spoilt the gardens to some extent, that those ruins which remained should have been left as Nature in her time had caused them to become, or if rebuilt, then that they should have been made exactly as they originally stood, for as the old Colonel commented, "no Hindu or Sikh can be expected to improve a Moghul garden or summerhouse, they may like flowers in their ladies' hair, they may like them in vases or in pots on the steps or round the verandahs, but they were never great at gardening!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Doctor and the Shawl and Carpet Maker

IT was not until I had been in Srinagar for well over a week that I first met Abdul Rahman—a name which means "Servant of the Compassionate". He wore the voluminous effeminate gown which all Kashmiris, whether they be man or woman, favour, a costume all their own of which they need not be jealous, for none would envy it them; on his head was an enormous spotless white turban, so big that I might have taken him for a Hindu had the tika mark not been missing from his forehead; his handsome rugged old face was made the more interesting by a perfectly trimmed white beard which had been faultlessly fashioned to a point by the barber, his grey eyes deep set under bushy eyebrows, his nose large and well shaped.

On that particular early evening the Colonel and I were walking along the bund of the canal which runs from the Dal Gate to the Srinagar Club, when, crossing the main road, a smartly trotting horse drawing a private tonga only just missed the old man. The syce immediately drew up, and the passenger leapt out from the tonga with the agility of a youth. Then to my amazement, for the Colonel was a little bit of a snob, I saw both men greet each other as though they were long lost brothers.

After some minutes of animated conversation, I was introduced to Doctor Abdul Rahman with such a gesture and in such a manner that it was obvious that he was a man of some importance, then came, "but for him, my dear fellow, I should have been in the bone-yard these past twenty years". A remark which brought the soft voiced quiet correction spoken to me, "In Kashmir we refer to them as Gardens of Rest!"

Abdul Rahman was a Hakim. They call themselves doctors, but it is more precise to describe them as physicians and herb-

alists, and there must be between two and three hundred of any standing in the State, one usually being found in any sizable town or large village. They are not surgeons, under no circumstances do they use a knife, although on occasions they will mark with a pen the place to be cut or the vein to be opened by the barber who always acts as the village surgeon. Neither do they attend confinements; that is a duty undertaken by special midwives, who when they are in trouble, call in one of the "wise women," also herbalists, and like the Hakims, having a very considerable knowledge of the values of herbs.

Our intended call at the Club was immediately abandoned and an invitation to the Doctor's house accepted; we climbed into the tonga drawn by the only horse in Kashmir that I was not ashamed to be seen riding behind, the roadway clearing to the musical ring of what appeared to be the giant of all bicycle bells, one which was foot-operated by the driver.

From the main road, we turned into a side street, one which ran down to the river, winding, narrow and edged with an open drain on either side. The roadway was damp, the drains stank, yet to get clear of being run over, the people had to stand across them. There were shops on both sides as the street widened, some selling foodstuffs, others soaps, a baker's shop, iron workers, pottery, leather workers, hat makers and so on. We came out on a small square, but almost immediately the tonga turned sharply into what appeared to be an alleyway. A man about his private business squatting at the drain and with his back to the people in the road, only just managed to leap to his feet and get out of the path of the horse; a trembling old woman pressed her back against the wall and spat curses at the driver. Then we stopped and clambered down to enter a wall-enclosed patch of garden with a large tree shading it. From here ran a flight of covered outside stairs to the first floor which was an enormous room with many doors leading from it; from which it could be judged that the house was indeed large.

The floor was entirely covered with carpets; pictures of Moghul times were on the walls, a few small low tables were scattered about, against one wall stood a bookcase and near it what would appear to the newcomer to Kashmir to be a counting house desk without legs, but in fact was just a desk so made

in order that the writer might sit on the floor and do his work. We also sat on the floor and after a while a servant brought coffee; the service of solid silver, the coffee thick, black and very much sweetened, being served in tumbler-like, heavily engraved, silver mugs which matched the tray and large pot.

Some time later the Colonel explained to me that some twenty years before he had had his sister staying with him on the houseboat. She was a martyr to arthritis and had spent hundreds of guineas on specialists and treatments, but without effect. She had come to stay with him in Kashmir in the faint hope that the climate might help her, but there had been no improvement. Then at tea one day a friend of theirs, Doctor Neve, the surgeon of the two famous brothers who for years ran the Medical Mission in Srinagar, said, "No harm could come of her seeing old Abdul Rahman who has a 'doctor's shop' in the city and is without doubt one of the cleverest botanists I have ever met. His knowledge of herbs is far more extensive than any European doctor, for there are plants in this valley and up in the mountains which have never been heard of in Europe or America." Within three months of starting the Hakim's treatment all pains had gone, never to return till the day she died, which was nearly fifteen years later.

The Colonel's own debt to him was very great. Like so many military men he was terrified of the knife, and when he heard in the Delhi Military Hospital that the pain in his side was appendix trouble and called for an operation, he fled to Kashmir to make himself fit for it—that is what he told his friends anyway, although it was really to collect his courage together. But a few days after his arrival he was taken with violent pains. The doctors said an immediate operation was necessary and would have to be performed the next morning, if not before. It so happened that Abdul Rahman called at the houseboat that evening; he went back to his shop and returned with a bottle of Kashmir medicine which he assured him would relieve the pain. The Colonel admits now that his mind must then have been unbalanced that he even considered taking a dose, but he did, and by the following morning when the bottle was empty and the surgeon examined him before admittance to hospital,

all signs of his trouble had gone, while to this day his appendix remains with him.

Like so many trades in Kashmir—and doctoring with them is a trade more than a profession—the secrets are passed down from one generation to another. The secrets of the Hakims are kept to the Hakims, the secrets of each of their families kept to the family, so it was that the sons of Abdul Rahman were now the doctors who attended in the shop, leaving the old man to attend the wealthier patients who sent for him, those who considered it beneath their dignity to call at his shop. The only difference was that instead of paying the few annas, they paid ten rupees or more for each visit. I was afterwards told by the manji that as the old man got nearer to making his last peace with God, so the number of poor patients he attended outside without charge had increased.

The only men employed outside the family were the household servants. In the buildings lining the little walled garden, those which had originally been built as servants' quarters, the grandsons worked under the guidance of a son. Here the herbs, which still included many which had been gathered by the shepherds when tending flocks on the higher slopes of the mountains in the summer, some grown in small gardens, others collected by peasant families who also had specialised in it, with once again the trade passing from father to son, were pounded into ointments, burned to ashes for their powders, squeezed to oils, boiled into lotions or fermented into medicines.

From the windows which reached to the floor and were only protected by a foot high ornamental wooden screen, I could see the great river. Getting up and looking down below I saw the filthy bank, with barges tied close, piles of wood ready for the winter, boys playing in the dirty water, and two women squatting down for the same natural purpose as was the man at the gutter when we came in. When I was sitting down again on the thick carpet, this filth was lost to view; it was indeed difficult to believe that it existed when one looked across the water at the White Palace with the gilded dome of its temple shining in the autumn evening light.

As I did so Abdul Rahman told me that whereas many of the shops on the Bund—the European shopping centre—pro-

claimed by arms and crests their appointment to certain of the Viceroys or Maharajas, his family could claim such patronage from the rulers of Kashmir further back than any of them, that they were the direct descendants of the Yogi who had cured King Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din of his running sore, the difference in his and their religion being explained by the many changes which had taken place in most of the Kashmir valley families with the changes of dynasties. He can claim that distinction, and who can deny it? In all probability it is substantially true.

Later on, when he had made sure that I was unable to read the script, he brought out from an ancient iron chest a number of very old books—one he assured me was over five hundred years old—in which the descriptions of ailments and their cures were set forth. Some were in verse and rhyme; probably so that they could be better memorised, and in one book of old hand-made paper which had become so brittle with age that the binding fold had broken, there were sketches. All those of his family had studied under their fathers with the aid of these books, so many times had they gone through the pages that he was sure that his sons, just as he, could recite them word for word.

One of the sons came up to consult his father, and discovering that I was more than interested in their work, offered to take me down to the "shop". We first went out on to the roadway, and I found that part of the ground floor of the building was an open-fronted shop abutting on to the road which, being narrow, had no sidewalk and was only just wide enough for two carts to pass each other. On both sides there were gutters which carried down all the filth from the road, the houses and the shops, and were, as I had seen, used for other purposes. The floors of the shops extended over these gutters and a short wide step-ladder took one from road to shop.

The walls were lined with rows of bottles of medicines; they were not the usual chemists' bottles, but old gin, whisky or wine bottles. Beneath were earthenware jars containing ointments, the tops tied over with pieces of cloth and on the bottom shelves were used biscuit tins and some kegs containing powders.

The two doctor sons were sitting cross-legged on the white sheet-covered floor one at each side of the shop attending to patients. The patient then consulting each was surrounded by

the others waiting their turn but as interested in his complaint as was the doctor. After a time one of the doctors and the young man he was then attending got up and passed into the "consulting room" at the side. It merely had a curtain by way of a door, and this having shrunk in the wash, being a foot off the floor and short for the width, from where I sat I could see that the patient was seeking advice on a common disease of an intimate nature.

When either of the doctors had reason to touch a patient, they most elaborately washed their hands in an enamel bowl standing at their sides, but the same water was used the whole time.

The doctor would write down his prescription on a slip of paper, this the patient took to the end of the shop where a grandson sat; his department was the dispensary. Most patients brought their own bottles. He told me that the medicines were ready to take, that is, they did not need to be diluted, for the patients expected a large quantity for their money. Ointments and powders were put into paper. Paper was short in Kashmir at that time, and used pages from school exercise books were being used for bags. The prescription was then put on a stab file and the money for the consultation and medicine collected before the latter was handed over. I was surprised to discover that a complete card index record of date, patient, complaint and prescription was kept so that the doctor could refer back, but more surprising was the charge, the average over-all being eight annas—eight pence. And yet the doctor's is now a wealthy family.

As I looked at the "Doctor's shop" and dispensary, my thoughts went back to our village blacksmith at home, who in addition to running the oil and colour merchant's shop is by way of being an amateur veterinary surgeon, and just as the local farmers swear by the wonderful results obtained from the blacksmith's drenches, so do the people of the valley remain faithful to the Hakims.

I made a note of some of the more common herbs used there—those of which a few outside the fraternity were aware.

Known as Isband, the English Rue, when burnt to ashes, is used to wash the hair: the leaves kill bugs.

Wena, known in England as Horse-mint, when mixed with salt and chilli is believed to be very stimulating to old men with young wives.

Won Hand is the Kashmiri name for Chicory. Used as a vegetable it is an excellent tonic for a woman after childbirth.

Old English Thyme made into jam is a cure for one with stomach or liver troubles; it has an additional quality, being good for those with weak eyesight.

How many know that the autumn-dug roots of Thistles, if mixed in equal quantities of sugar cane, are a most excellent tonic for nervous complaints?

Again, Daphne leaves are good for the same diseases.

The Milfoil leaf is used in a concoction to cure stomach troubles.

The Dock root pounded up and mixed with an ointment is good to apply to boils.

The common stinging-nettle leaves, pounded down to a wet state, are good to apply to wounds; the root boiled with tea is said to cure malaria. It is amusing and interesting to read in the little book from which I obtained these cures the note that "The leaf covered stalks of this plant when used as a punishment rod on the bared bottoms of small bad boys, who are first caused to bend over that the skin may be stretched tight, has a wonderful curative effect on their naughtiness. (Warning). It should never be used as a corrective after the breaking of the voice betrays that he has reached the stage of manhood."

The juice of the stems of the common Sorrel is a most excellent cure for many eye troubles.

The seeds of hollyhocks, the leaves of violets, the roots of foxgloves, all figure among the many flowers and herbs known to the European and American countries and growing wild in the valleys of Kashmir.

Others are cultivated for their herbal values, for instance there are large gardens of Pyrethrum near to Baramula—in spite of which the Kashmiri too frequently scratches himself from bug irritation. At Pampur, some nine miles from Srinagar, there are extensive saffron fields, able to supply both dyes and medicines. From the mountains in the north of the valley the shepherds bring the roots of the Kuth plant which grows wild there. Large quantities of this were exported by the State to India; from Bombay it was exported to China for the making of Joss sticks for temples, the scent being like orris blended with violets.

Some of this manages to find its way back into the Hakims' shop, for they claim it to be a cure for many ills, such as asthma, dyspepsia, skin troubles, rheumatism, toothache, and the ever dreaded cholera. It is surprising that this plant, the botanical name of which is the Saussurea Lappa, is not cultivated more, since I was told that it is possible, a few of the Hakims having successfully done so in their walled gardens.

The next morning together with Asghar, the youngest son of old Abdul, I set off for the saffron fields which were then in full bloom.

Asghar was the only member of the family who did not desire to become a doctor. With the astuteness of a boy born of old parents, he realised that he would be just one of the family profession if he remained there, and he decided to take up barbering, a suggestion which shocked the father and uncles until they realised that he was intending to become a barber of distinction, for he now called himself a "Surgical Barber"—it was he who performed the minor operations suggested by the brothers; it was he who was called in to carry out the circumcision of the Muslim boy, and his fees were high; he had never trimmed a beard or shaved off the hair of any man, and he brought more money into the family coffers than any of them.

Kashmir claims that the quality of the saffron it grows far surpasses that which is produced by Spain, France, Sicily, or on the lower sides of the Apennines. When we first came upon the fields I was amazed that they were purple and not yellow in colour. The heavy perfume of the crocus-like flowers hung everywhere, and with the breeze in our direction we caught the scent from the fields a mile before we reached them.

The low lying plateau which rests on the banks of the Jhelum River is a mass of thousands of small beds about a yard square, each one above the other. The plants, growing from a bulb which is much like the common garden crocus, are annually planted some six inches apart for three years running, then the ground is allowed to remain fallow for a season, no fertilizer is added and no other crop is grown upon it. It is said that originally the land was made up from silt from the Jhelum, which is excellent for saffron; there is no doubt that the chemical content

of the ground here is good, even the crops of wheat nearby were better than any I saw in other fields.

Each flower has six stigmas protruding from the perianth, three of these are yellow and three red or orange with red tips. After the flower has come to full bloom, men, women and children pick them carefully, they are next laid out in the sun to dry. The old men and women then sit and separate the stigmas into two heaps, one red, the other yellow. The red stigmas make the best quality of saffron, the yellow the second grade, which the Kashmiri proudly declares to be equal to the first grade of any foreign fields.

These saffron fields are owned by the State and auctioned off each year. There is a belief, which is confirmed by records kept over many years, that no serious outbreak of disease can occur or spread among the people living near to the fields.

Nearby are many open spaces where holiday-makers camp, and as though catering for these visitors, on moonlit autumn nights the villagers gather together in the brightly coloured fields to sing and dance to the tunes of folk-songs which have been written around the saffron fields. Usually the theme of the song is sad, of lovers who have been parted, their beloved being drawn away by the beauty and fragrant scent of the flowers.

The story associated with the introduction of the plants into Kashmir dates back to the time of King Lalta Dit. In the city of Padampur—now known as Pampur—there lived a famous physician. A *nag* or water-god who fell sick with eye disease went to the physician to be cured of his complaint, but although he tried all the known medicines, the trouble remained. The physician was baffled and asked his patient whether he was a man, and on learning that he was a *nag* realized that all the remedies he had applied to his patient's eyes had been killed by the poisonous breath of the water-god. Once again he applied the ointments, but this time bound the *nag's* eyes with a cloth and they were cured. In his gratitude the *nag* then presented to the physician one bulb of saffron and from this has been built up the fields which now spread all around Pampur.

Until Asghar told me, I did not know that the Persians and the Spaniards mix saffron with their rice, that it used to be strewn in the Moghul courts to perfume them, that when Nero made his

entry into Rome it was sprinkled in the streets, but I did know that it was an essential part in some of the sacred ceremonies of the Hindus and that the Buddhist monks dyed their robes with it.

That evening in his home I had my fill of a dish of rice flavoured with honey, coloured and scented with saffron and mixed with sultanas: it was delicious. When father and son came to the houseboat I had the cook make currant buns flavoured with saffron as they make them to this day in Cornwall, and which to my astonishment had been made for me by a negro mammie in a Sierra Leone village.* So it was that I introduced to them yet another use for their saffron.

Shah Mohammad Baba—who always refers to me as "my very good friend"—had a different approach as a salesman to any I have ever met in Kashmir. I so well remember our first meeting; I was sitting on the verandah of the houseboat after a good lunch at a time between box wallah's attacks, when I saw drifting close to the line of houseboats one of the usual salesmen's shikaras—they were all the same, without curtains or cushions, just plain wood with a straw plaited canopy over the middle supported on four poles. It was the two boatmen who first attracted my attention, obviously father and son, they were very smart, fine types wearing shalwars—baggy, white, pyjama-like trousers—white sweaters and grey, Persian lamb, round hats at the same angle; their dripping paddles were held out of the water as they rested and the shikara moved with the gentle flow. Under the canopy was an old—very old—bearded Muslim, the hair of his head and beard dyed red. The bottom of the boat was covered by a Persian rug and he sat alone cross-legged upon it. Away in front of him was an opened bundle of coloured shawls, but at the time his attention was entirely on the one which he was most careful darning. As he came nearer I could see that it was a most exquisite piece; then with the shikara close at hand he looked up and folded it, at the same time pulling from the bundle one or two others; so beautiful and rare were they that when the shikara had moved on I called to ask him if they were for sale. Even then he did not immediately return; the shikara

* See *Sierra Leone Story*, by the Author.

wallahs dipped their paddles and stopped the drift and the old man remarked quietly, "Perhaps the sahib would like me one day to come to his houseboat to display to his honour my collection. When would your honour wish to see them?" And only when I said that I then had time, and to my surprise heard myself adding, "If you have," did he order the boatman to paddle back to the houseboat. He picked up two of the shawls and handed them to the younger of his two boatmen who had come forward to help him up the ladderway. The youth then gave him the shawls and remained under the canopy holding the shikara close to the ladder, never for one moment taking his eyes from his master.

Aziza, the manji, came along and greeted him happily, afterwards whispering in my ear, "The old man is some little bit deaf, sahib. He is a very honest man. He has served all British Residents since there is one in Srinagar. You can have pucka trust for him."

I can remember now how at the time I wondered how much commission the boatman would get on anything I bought; afterwards I heard that if Shah Mohammad Baba had sold a shawl to one of the visitors, when the winter came—and not until that time—the boatman received a blanket, for he refused to pay commission in cash.

I have arrived at the conclusion that there are few men living who know as much about Kashmir shawls and their past history as does this old man. After meeting him a number of times he admitted that Baba was an addition to his name—"my trade name" he called it, for Ala Baba was the Kashmiri who invented the art of the Amlikar shawl. The story goes that his invention was brought about by a fowl, after walking in some dye, continuing its journey across a white sheet. Unable to remove the foot marks he thought to cover them with coloured threads and the improvement upon the original plain sheet was so admired that he worked further upon it.

This the old man told me as he tenderly handled the shawl of which I asked the price, thinking that it might be at most a few hundred rupees, when I heard him quote three thousand rupees—and as he spoke I knew that was his last price.

His business, his hobby and his one love is shawls, with the

result that although he well knew I should not purchase one of his valuable pieces, he had found someone who was interested in them, and remained the whole of the afternoon displaying the antique ones he had with him, then a few of those which had come from his workrooms, the borders of which were copied from parts of others.

When eventually he left our houseboat we had to call his shikara from behind it, the boatman at first having moved to the shady side, here casting out fishing lines, the older man having a puff at his hookah pipe, the younger one getting the samovar going for the odd dish of tea.

In the meantime the two remaining old shawls had been brought to us and one bundle of new ones, these tied up in a linen sheet. But they all came gradually, it was so different from the usual trader, who almost at his own invitation transferred the whole contents of his shikara into one's living room, usually insisting on proving his *bona fides* by extracting from the black tin box his order book and asking, "You know this gentleman, sahib. Him very good customer me!", then flattering the "knowall" with "I can see sahib is clever man, sahib is knowing each and everything!"

What I did see of the old man's were two books, one containing the acknowledgement letters from the most famous of museums throughout the world, a book only shown to those who were interested in old shawls, and the other not until I went to his workrooms and house at Third Bridge, when he produced for me a hand-written book containing a history of Kashmir shawls and a wealth of knowledge of the art as it once was. It contained copies of articles and extracts from any book on the subject of Kashmir shawls whether they had been written in English, Persian, Urdu, French or Sanskrit. Commenced over a hundred years ago, grandfather, father and now the aged son had made their contribution; the cover was a piece of old shawl stretched over hard boards.

I found references to passages in the Bible and the Koran, a mention in Ezekiel of merchants bringing from the East cedar chests containing delightfully embroidered works of art; it was presumed that these came from Kashmir; then in Judges of patterns of needlework on both sides—an art which they claim

was then only known in Kashmir. Another reference was to the travellers in the time of Solomon who returned from the Far East with spices, and also with delicate gossamer muslins from Dacca and beautiful coloured shawls from Kashmir. From a book dealing with the Roman Empire, there was talk of the Emperor Nero's spontaneous gift of such a shawl to a famous Grecian athletic youth who had excelled himself in the Colosseum—"a fabulous shawl of many colours which in the years it had taken in creating stole from the skies, the hills, the lakes and the fields some of the wondrous colours from the topmost parts of India".

The shawl industry then seems to have died out, and would appear to have been revived by a Persian, for it is written that in "A.D. 1378 Mir Sayid Ali of Hamadan in Persia, known in India as Shah Hamadan, visited Kashmir for the second time and remained for more than two years, during which time he revived the art, one to which the Sultan Qutb-ul-din gave his patronage and encouraged". It was not until nearly two hundred years after this that the word "shawl" was given to the square of material; it is said that one Nagz Beg, a man of Khoqand in Central Asia, who came from that country as a cook with the Vizier to the then ruler of Kashmir, had a piece of *pashmina* made about one and a half yards square and presented it to his master. Upon his master asking what it was he replied "Shawl" —the Khoqand word for blanket. To this day in Central Asia a kind of blanket called a "Shawlki" is manufactured.

The story associated with the first patterns is that a worker weaving the pushmina cloth received a clout from Nagz Beg for some carelessness; the man's nose bled and stained the cloth which as a square had almost been completed. Nagz Beg instead of being consumed with fury was delighted with the effect of the red spots on the shawl and had some pashmina threads dyed red and others green, these he had woven in regular rows —the commencement of a decoration for the shawl.

Then came the improvement brought about by Saida Baba—as usual with an *alias*, his being Ala Baba. He lived in Srinagar during the reign of Azad Khan, an Afghan Governor who ruled the land from 1783 to 1785, and it was his name that old Shah Mohammad had added to his own.

Lawrence in his book *The Valley of Kashmir* written in 1895, says that M. Henri Dauvergne who had been intimately connected with the shawl trade of Kashmir for many years had decided that the Kashmir shawl dated back to the time of the Emperor Baba. He said that the Moghul emperors wore on their turbans a jewelled decoration known as a *jigha*; shaped like an almond which frequently formed the base for an aigrette of feathers. An Andijani weaver copied the shape of the *jigha* in a scarf for the Emperor and it became the fashionable design for shawls from then onwards.

One shawl maker declares that the shape is neither the *jigha*, the mango nor the curve of the River Jhelum, but the mark of a clenched fist which is a copy of the impression a dyer made as to emphasize a point he struck his fist down first on the dye pad and then on some cloth. He liked the design and copied it. I repeat the suggestion for what it is worth, but doubt whether it is a fact.

A writer Abul Fazal wrote in his *Ain-i-Akbari* that the Emperor Akbar was "very fond of shawls. By the solicitude of His Majesty the manufacture of shawls in Kashmir is in a very flourishing state." At that time the shawl was still a yard and a half square and of such fine texture that the test of its quality was to pass it twisted through a finger ring—hence the name "Ring Shawl". Bernier, a traveller to Kashmir in the Emperor Aurangzeb's time, wrote in 1665 of shawls "peculiar to Kashmir" and filling the country with wealth.

In 1739 Nadir Shah's Ambassador to Constantinople took among the fifteen elephant loads of presents, a number of Kashmir shawls which the Sultan presented to the wives of the ambassadors of his court. The Moghul Emperor Muhammad Shah was presented with a shawl of floral design which he so much liked that he ordered that forty thousand rupees worth of them should be made for him each year; the design is still named after him.

In 1796 in the time that Abdullah Khan was the Afghan Governor of Kashmir, there came from Baghdad to Kashmir a blind man named Sayid Yashaya. When he took his leave the Governor gave him an orange-coloured shawl as a parting gift. This the blind man took to Egypt and gave as a present to the Khedive. Soon after this Napoleon Bonaparte went to Egypt

with his fleet with a view to harassing the British in India; Nelson destroyed it on the Nile. The Khedive presented to Napoleon the orange shawl and the Emperor gave it to his Josephine. From that hour Kashmir shawls became the fashion first in France and then all over Europe; French traders travelled to Kashmir to purchase shawls, to order more and yet more of various designs and colours for France.

The shawl trade flourished under Sikh rule. Moorcroft wrote of it in 1822 that "the value of shawls manufactured there was estimated at thirty-five lacs of rupees a year." With the terrible famine in 1834 it suffered a crushing blow and all but died, but with Maharaja Gulab Singh becoming the ruler the trade revived, and started its final glorious epoch.

All are agreed that the very best shawls ever produced in Kashmir were made during the time of the Maharaja Ranbir Singh between the years 1865 and 1872. Their texture was of the finest, their colours soft and kindly and their patterns of the Eastern style, most elaborate. The people who made the shawls did not profit though, but the merchants did; they became so rich that they did not know how to spend their money; one writer says that they were so wealthy that they put milk instead of water in their hookahs. It is recorded that at this time twenty-seven thousand persons in Kashmir were engaged in making shawls.

Then came the Franco-German war, inflicting heavy consequences on the Kashmir shawl trade. In the years 1878 and 1879 there also came a terrible famine in the valley. The Maharaja coped with the famine and advanced a million rupees to the shawl manufacturers, but to no avail, and the weavers either moved down to the Punjab or started making shawls of inferior quality.

The British struck the last blow to the industry, for a Scotsman named Kerr started to manufacture in the town of Paisley shawls which were mill-made copies of those from Kashmir, but to be purchased for the same number of shillings as the Kashmir hand-made ones had cost in guineas. The shawl which the housemaid or cook had so long envied her mistress was now within her reach, and wearing these the servants paraded to Church on Sundays while the lovely Kashmir shawl of which the lady of the

house had been so proud, found a new use as a drapery over the back of the drawing-room piano; others went into the bottom drawer to be taken out fifty years later when none knew the difference between a Kashmir and a Paisley shawl and it was decided that grandma's old shawl would make a useful, colourful evening cloak; then many almost priceless Kashmir shawls were hacked into shape by Court Dressmakers. I had personal experience of this, for Shah Mohammad brought from a Chinese camphorwood box his finest showpiece, one which had four plain panels of different colours worked into it, and having a perfect multicoloured fringe emerging from a black base border. He smiled as he told me how a customer had that season had the audacity to offer him five thousand rupees for it. He would not sell it to anyone, he said, and smoothed it lovingly as an old maid would her cat. I also examined it, and to my horror realized that this shawl for which an offer of three hundred and seventy-five pounds had been sneered at, was a perfect match to one my wife had but a few years before, "because it is so large and bulky," had "shaped" into an evening cloak by her dressmaker, the latter not even returning the cut portions. And I had bought it a few years before for five pounds in an old English country town antique shop!

One who has not seen a Kashmir shawl will quite naturally ask "What is there that is so wonderful about it—how is it different from any other shawl?"

First there is the foundation, and the raw material for this consists of the fine flossy, short, soft underwool called Keliphumb or the pashm of the Kel or shawl goats which inhabit the Tibetan mountains. The higher on the mountains of the Himalayas the goats live the finer and warmer their wool. It is said that the best wools came from the Tian Shan or Celestial Mountains and Ush Tarfan, though some merchants claim that the wool from Changthong, the eastern district of Ladakh and from Turfan is of better quality. The men who trade in the commodity are called Tebet Baqals, and most of it comes by caravan by the Kashgar, Yarkand and Leh routes.

When it is received in Kashmir it is sorted over by hand with great care by the women who first wash it, not with soap, but with rice paste, which ensures that it retain its softness and does

not entirely remove all the natural oil from the wool, then it is spun on a spinning-wheel into a fine thread; this especially requires much patience and a delicacy of fingers because of the shortness of the fibre. The wool is dyed in the yarn, only natural dyes being used, and in the old days there were some sixty tints to be had.

There are two most favoured ways of making the shawl, one the method by which small segments of woven shawl are sewn together so cleverly and neatly that the join cannot be seen; this is known as Kani; the other is the Amlikar, in which the foundation is a sheet of plain pushmina over which is worked, by needle, a close elaborate pattern.

With weaving the method employed is unusual. The design is made up by the *Naqash*, but instead of working from a diagram or coloured drawing, the weaver is given as the pattern a *t'alim*—rows of symbols, each of which tell the number of threads and the colours to be worked in. Next to the weaver sits another worker. He is the *Khahan Wol*, the one who translates from pattern to weaver, the latter having at hand a tray filled with bobbins of every colour required. As the *Khahan Wol* reads aloud the symbol and the weaver follows his instruction, the design gradually shows itself, neither of them knowing what it will be like until the colours appear in the shawl.

When completed it is taken and washed in the Dal Lake, the soft waters of which are known to be especially suited to the frail fibres of the pashmina and at the same time renders the colours fast whilst bringing out their brightness.

And then on to the men and boys who make the shawls, for the women only do the spinning and sometimes undertake the dyeing; "what are and what were these men and boys like?" one wonders; "they must be intelligent, they must have been well paid for the shawls are costly." But if one were to pick out of the villages or the streets of Srinagar the most sickly looking males and ask them their trade there is little doubt that they would admit to being engaged in the shawl, carpet or kindred trades. All day long they sit hunched up over their stitching or before their looms, and the rates of pay in the past—and unfortunately in the present—have no comparision to the price asked for the finished article. The trader tells his customer that the material

is costly, the wages demanded by his workers are high, the pure dyes used are practically unobtainable other than at a price which he dare not repeat, and you discover that the wage even now paid to workers is little more than half that given to a household servant whilst in the past when the gems of shawls now sold as antiques to museums and collectors were being made, the average wage was as low as four rupees a month.

The department which was set up to control the shawl trade in the State as far back as the sixteen hundreds was called the "Dagshawl", the fortunate official who was in charge became the "Darogah of the Dagshawl".

The wool is and always has been costly. When the income earned from shawls was high the State levied terrific taxes not only on the manufactured shawl before it could be sold, but additional taxes when exported from the State, not forgetting to charge import duty on the raw wool as it entered the country. With the differing rulers came the changing methods of collecting taxes, sometimes a poll tax on the weaver, sometimes a tax on the loom, at times the State collected the finished shawl and marketed it, and after deducting the taxes due, the maker got what was left.

Yet in spite of the heavy taxations the number of looms was large. In 1813 there were twenty-four thousand, though during the rule of Sheikh Ghulam Mohiud-Din (1841–46) the Dalpat so increased the taxation on shawls, that only five thousand looms remained working, and it is said that twenty-two weavers of shawls cut off their thumbs so that they might not be forced to continue in their profession, while in the times of the Sikhs, taxation and famine reduced the number to as few as twelve hundred. Then when the shawl became fashionable in France, they increased to eleven thousand looms with twenty-seven thousand workers, each loom having two and a half men, that is, two men and a boy earning from two to five rupees a month. Today the number of shawl looms can be counted on the hand, for those who inherited the art have gone over to the making of carpets if they were weavers, and if they were Amlikar shawl makers, to the differing kinds of embroidery work now thought of by the visitor as a part of Kashmir.

I went over the workrooms of old Shah Mohammad. A red

bearded, withered old Muslim wearing thick glasses was sitting on a window balcony with his eyes close to the work as, with claw-like fingers, he invisibly repaired an antique shawl. As usual I was told he was one hundred years old. Referring to his red beard I asked Shah Mohammad if he too had been to Mecca—Shah Mohammad had gone there eight years before and now henna-dyed his beard as a sign of having made the pilgrimage—but he laughed and explained that the old shawl-worker's dye was nothing less than conceit to cover his age because he was thinking of marrying again and had his eye on a pretty young girl!

Before an upright loom on the other side another oldish man was working sitting cross-legged, whilst at his side sat a man calling out the pattern from a piece of paper held in front of him. I carefully examined the two feet of carpet he had worked —an old shawl design; as I got close I saw that each emblem, each shape, differed just a little from the other; this was deliberate, for only Allah can make the perfect matching; those shawls or carpets that are man-made may at first appear to be the same, but on closer examination they vary slightly, this being one of the simple tests between hand-made and machine-made ones.

In another room there were several men, again most of them with grey beards and although wearing glasses, with their heads close to their work, embroidering with coloured silks on a pashmina foundation shawl, although none was covering the whole of the square as had been the practice in the past, now only wide borders were made. At the back was a young man who was drawing the design on a cloth square with a pencil. At first the piece of material was stretched out flat on the floor and he sketched the main outline of the design, then holding it in his hand filled in the details, the embroiderer colouring it according to the order. In another corner boys were working on chain-stitch mats with the special loop needles which carry the stitch as would a machine. Again they were following over a drawn design; this being an exact copy of an expensive rug. Downstairs were the men who worked on numdas; these are floor coverings about three by four feet, the foundation being pressed felt—sometimes white, sometimes grey—on which coloured wool designs are made; they are mostly crude but fill

the demand made by a cheap market and are more suited to the nursery or child's bedroom floor—a sample of the work now undertaken by the descendants of those who were once world famous for their exquisite shawls.

Not far from Srinagar is one village which specializes in the making of these; another is famous for its gubbas. These floor or bed covers are made up on a cloth base consisting of old rags which have been stitched together to make a blanket and then dyed black. The methods of decoration are two, the first being that flowers and shapes are cut out from coloured wool cloth and stitched on the black base, the other, and the more costly, though neither of the finished gubbas cost many rupees—is a decoration with wool which has been worked through by the chain-stitch needles over a drawn design, usually one or two colours only being used in this most effective decoration.

Upstairs again, I was taken to a room overlooking the river from which I could see the Shah Hamadan Mosque. Here there were four youngish men sitting and working with needles on material stretched on frames. The flower designs were dainty and the colours blended perfectly, the stitch so small that it was difficult to separate. The hand-worked *petit point* work which comes out of Kashmir can stand against any rivals, and it was a joy to see here an industry which might not die with the workers, for those who sat in the workroom were young. It takes eight years of apprenticeship to reach perfection in the work; still the worker's pay is poor, but the same now applies to the cost of the finished articles, most of which are ladies' evening bags.

Together with Shah Mohammad and his son I went up to a room in their house. The son was telling me that he had long tried to convince his father that he should be permitted to go to England and America to sell their shawls and carpets. He had made a deep study of the history of carpets, and before long I realized he was trying over his sales line on me.

The art was introduced into Kashmir by the Great King Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din, and it came about in this way. In 1397 Tamerlane came to India after his conquest of Persia and Turkistan. When he got as far as Attock, Sikander But-shikan, the then ruler of Kashmir, sent him a message acknowledging him as his liege

lord. Accepting this, Tamerlane was pleased and sent him presents of an elephant and other gifts. In return Sikander sent precious articles to Tamerlane together with a request that he might be permitted to travel to his camp to pay homage, to which Tamerlane replied that he might do so at Attock on his return from his imminent conquest of the Hindustan. When he heard that Tamerlane was returning to Attock from plundering Hindustan, Sikander started out from Srinagar, but on reaching Baramula learned that he had moved on to Samarqand, and returning to Srinagar he sent his second son, a young boy named Shahi Khan, with the gifts to Tamerlane.

Shahi Khan arrived at the capital of the great conqueror and handed over the presents sent by his father to Tamerlane who "took to liking the beautiful youth from Kashmir and bestowed much favour upon him, forbidding him return to his country". For seven years the son of the King of Kashmir remained in Samarqand and during that time lost no time in studying the arts and crafts of the people of that city which was then at the height of its glory. Tamerlane died in 1405 whilst conducting an expedition to China, and not until then could Shahi Khan return to his homeland. Sikander, a king who had been hated by his downtrodden subjects, died in 1416, to be succeeded by his eldest son Ali Shah, another bad king for the people whom he ruled for six or seven years, and then Shahi Khan came to the throne and took the name of Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din.

He immediately set about improving the lot of his people "having high ideals and a moral outlook". He not only encouraged, but started many of the industries of Kashmir, among them carpet weaving, for which purpose he brought some of the best weavers from Samarqand. Within a few years the people of Kashmir who had on his accession only known how to weep, now laughed, working happily at the new-found trades, and this condition continued for the whole fifty-one years of the beloved king's reign.

Carpet weaving continued to flourish in Kashmir for many years after that, but then it started to fade away and at one time, some two hundred years after Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din came to the throne, it became a lost art. Then in the time when the Emperor Jahangir ruled over the country, a Kashmiri, by name Akhun

Rahnuma, returning through Asia on his way back from performing the Haj pilgrimage, visited Andijan in Persia, a place in which carpets were made. He remained there for some time in order to learn the art and returned to Kashmir with the knowledge and the tools necessary for their weaving.

He gathered together some people and taught them how to make carpets once again. By that time carpets were in great demand and had risen in price as a result of their scarcity, so that those who learnt from him soon made for themselves large fortunes. They soon forgot their benefactor though and on one occasion when he went towards them, because they were proud and well dressed and he took little care of his clothes, they refused to recognize him. His curse all carpet-weavers remember until this day, "Zindus dung-dawal marit nah kafan tih" which means that during their lives they may live in plenty, but when dead even cloth for their burial shroud may not be found to cover them. The bad fortune of the carpet-weavers who earn only sufficient to live upon and permits them to save nothing, they attribute to this curse.

The carpets are now woven in the same manner as were the shawls, in a loom of which the warp threads are of cotton arranged in upright parallel order, that is, instead of working from a design in colour, the pattern, as with the shawl, is in symbols. The coloured balls of wool hang down to be taken in as called for by the pattern, the weaver ties the required number of threads of each colour, over each row a double cotton twine is threaded through by the fingers and pressed down with an iron comb. The weaver cuts each thread after it had been knotted into the warp and then evens the surface of the carpet by clipping it with shears.

In the old days the weavers used to follow a coloured picture of the design itself, but when the Maharaja Ranbir Singh ordered a great carpet which was to cover the Ajaib Ghar Hall in which the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, was to stay whilst on a visit to Jammu in 1875, time was short and it was found that there were only thirteen carpet-weavers in the State. At the suggestion of Albir Mir a *Khaban Wol*, the shawl method of symbols was introduced and with such additional workers as then became available, the carpet was completed in

time. Since that method, which is quicker, takes less time for the weaver to learn, and precludes many mistakes, it has now been adopted in the Kashmir carpet trade.

The first of Kashmir carpets were of flower design, with plans of gardens, birds, fish and animals, though these were later lost to the scroll designs.

The story is told that the Maharaja Ranjit Singh always longed to visit the valley but could not do so. To Colonel Mian Singh, his governor in Kashmir from 1841, he wrote of his longing to "enjoy the delight of wandering through the gardens of Kashmir fragrant with almond blossoms, and sitting on the fresh green turf". The sympathetic Governor had woven one grass-green coloured carpet on which were made pink spots dotted with silver, to convey to his master the green of a Kashmir lawn with the dew-covered almond petals which had fallen upon it, as a springtime picture drawn by the greatest of all artist carpet-weavers of Srinagar who themselves conveyed it to the Maharaja. It is said that when it was spread out before him he was so delighted that, imagining he was already in Kashmir, he lay down and rolled himself on it as though it were real turf; each of the three fortunate weavers he rewarded with a pair of golden bracelets.

Europeans next entered the carpet industry; at first there was failure to satisfy the tastes of England and France, the dyes were not suitable, the designs did not fit in with the schemes and so on, but there came a Frenchman who had had some experience of Kashmiri shawls, and Englishmen started up factories which at one time employed thousands of weavers. Gold medals and wreaths of gold were awarded for Kashmir carpets in the exhibitions of London and Paris; they were supplied to spread on the floors of Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle; they were made of silk and of pashmina wool, soft and so pliable that they were suited to cover the daintiest of furniture. Displaying to the full the colours and designs, so close was the stitch in some that as many as four hundred knots were counted to the inch.

Now, so Habiba the son of Shah Mohammad told me, the majority of carpet-weavers are again resting, but he is very sure that if only he could get to England or to America he could

recreate the demand for the lovely carpets made in his country, and if only another Empress Josephine would start up the fashion in shawls again, that trade also would flourish. If only— and the Kashmiri had not even now lost all hope of such a recovery.

CHAPTER NINE

The Commercial Arts

SHAWL and carpet making are not the only industrial arts which have survived the ages; it is now over six centuries since King Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din at the same time as he introduced shawl and carpet making into the country, also encouraged artists to come from Samarqand that they might teach his people "how to make pottery of light weight with paper, and those of his subjects who were able to lift the shapes and colours from the flowers and the birds and other beauties they had gazed upon, he had instructed in the art of decorating this paper pottery". There is little doubt that the master artists came from Persia, for to this day papier mâché is known as Kumangiri—that is, the illustrations of the bows and arrows of Persian soldiers, and many of the more lovely productions of the artists who execute their work for those who are able to pay the price of their time, are of the finer Persian design. A small colony of these descendants of the master craftsmen who proudly remind one of their Persian ancestors, still survives in Srinagar and is known as Kumangarpura.

The process of papier mâché making takes much time; no wonder that of recent years many of the articles which find their way into the cheaper markets to compete with the factory-made ones are of wood, which although they may deceive the eye, by their weight confess to their false foundation.

Having decided upon the shape of the piece to be produced, the potter makes up on his wheel, or the carpenter on his lathe, a vase, box shape or whatever it might be, but smaller than the finished article is required. Overnight the papier mâché maker soaks old paper shavings in a tank of water. Next morning these are lifted out and pounded with poles in a mortar until they

once again become the pulp that they were before being printed; this is usually grey in colour, having absorbed the newsprint. When of the correct consistencey, rice paste—or if there is a shortage of rice, glue—is added to it. The brick-hard potter's shape is now covered with strips of paper to ensure that the paste does not adhere to it and over the mould is evenly applied the paper paste; more strips of paper, sometimes thin muslin, are made to cover the shape and more of the pulp, until sometimes three layers reinforce it, the shape being dried for a few days in the sun before the next layer is added. When the maker is satisfied with the size and that the pot has dried hard, it is sawn in two or more pieces according to the shape, the mould removed and the papier mâché pieces are then carefully glued together again, with heavy weights—usually sacks of sand—holding the parts together. The complete piece is next covered with fine muslin strips and on this is painted *gutch*, a paste made from old wall plaster mixed with water and glue. When again dry the surface is rubbed smooth with a piece of hard burnt brick.

In the old days, and even now with a few men who are proud of their work, over this was applied a stain called *astar*, which was made by rubbing with water, stone of a kind only to be found in the quarry at Manasbal. On top of this stain *safeda Kashgari*, which is a white powder mixed with glue and water, is smoothed and over the whole, when dry, the ground colour of the artist's design is painted, this varying, being either gold, white lead, verdigris, ultramarine, or cochineal.

All this I watched being done in a little workshop of Imtiaz just behind the Bund, in that part where so many shops of the same sort are congregated together. There an artist painter was sitting drawing with *zarda*, yellow colour, on the base colour the outlines of the design and staining the spaces on which the flowers were to be painted with *astar* and white paint. Like so many of the arts of Kashmir, it had come down from father to son. It was fascinating to watch the freehand work of the master artist—known as the *nakash*—on the formal designs, drawing without geometrical instruments, the sketch being perfectly balanced, no easy task on a round box which has seven panels to be painted.

Then he handed the box, which was to have golden chinar leaves in its decoration, on to a younger man who painted in the leaves with a base coat of *zarda* mixed with glue and sugar, when this was finished he applied the gold leaf which adhered to that part only. Another lad took the box from him and completed the design, selecting colours for birds and flowers as he thought best and shading them as only an experienced artist can; there was no painter's palette, the colours being held in bits of broken crocks; one brush was used and washed after it had finished with each colour all over the box, when the lad turned to another and started round it again.

When dry the box was handed over to the youngest of the family, the old man's grandson who could only have been about eight years of age. It was this boy who had done most of the pounding up of the paper; now his job was to varnish the box. For this they used amber or copal powdered down and dissolved in linseed oil, after which it was stood out in the sun to dry before a second coat was applied. This was the final stage for the cheaper class of work, but for the more expensive pieces there was still more to be done; the surface rubbed over with wet grass and washed clean, the gold and silver leaves dissolved in brine water with glue, in order that details of shading and veins could be painted, the complete surface polished with a piece of jade stone, and lastly a final coating of amber varnish dried off in the sun.

In these days, in addition to wood being used as a base, the cheaper articles are painted with imported bright chemical colours, but still a few of the more expensive ones carry the colours made from finely powdered semi-precious stones which take hours to grind down, but remain for a hundred years as they were when first applied, subdued shades of rich reds, blues and browns, being freshened up by being washed and given the very occasional protecting coat of amber varnish, though the colours are never as bright—to the art lover, gaudy—as the chemical colours beloved by most of those who purchase from Kashmir.

Talking to the old man I heard of an art in which he was trained as a boy but which had now been lost to Kashmir,

though there still remain a few like him who could revive it if it were worth while. Until forty or fifty years ago Kashmir was well known for its enamel work on brass and copper. In this the powdered stone was used to decorate the engraved metal work like lovely vases, bells and lamps made for the mosques and monasteries. A few pieces, with lovely sapphire blues and ruby reds still bright, occasionally come into the market to be snatched up by the collectors of such choice pieces, but they are rare and I wondered why, if only on this score, one of the old workers has not revived it.

The secrets of paper-making were also brought to Kashmir from Samarqand during the reign of Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din, the industry first starting up in the State near to Ganderbal where water power was available to batter and pulp up the rags, whilst at Nowshera, vats were made in which the pulp was turned into paper.

The art of paper-making had reached Samarqand from China some eight hundred years before that time, the methods were improved upon during that period, but the same Persian methods are being used in Kashmir as had been introduced into the country five hundred years before.

Prior to the introduction of paper-making the Kashmiri had used birch-bark for his manuscripts, and many of these are to be found in the museums of the world, though few remain to be seen in the State itself.

In the making of Kashmir paper a mixture of old rags of cotton and linen are pounded together with a small quantity of hemp under a water-powered lever mill. A little crude carbonate of soda together with some slaked lime is added during this beating process; this is to soften and whiten the rags, though since cold water is always used for the process a large amount of the colour remains; to remove this would only necessitate boiling the pulp for a while, but the paper-maker insists that this form of caustic soda would weaken the finished product.

The mortar in which the rags are pounded is made of limestone. The pestle, which is worked by a lever on a pivoted beam, has an iron head which is four sided and in falling on the rags also chops them up as they are fed under it by hand. This pulp

passes through three pounding presses, each one tearing it to smaller threads; between each of these the pulp is taken out and placed in a kind of trough made by tying a length of cloth round the waists of two men and leaving a space of about six feet between them. The men then stand in a deep stream with the pulp in the cloth between them in the water, carefully ensuring the edges of the trough are above the surface. They agitate the pulp with their hands, the dirt it contains passes through the mesh of the cloth and is carried away.

Between each of the washings the pulp is drained and made up into foot square slabs about an inch thick and then laid out in the sun to bleach. The sun can only penetrate through about an eighth of an inch of this surface, but after being turned and exposed four times the resultant paper is reasonably whitish with a creamy tinge.

These washed and bleached slabs are then placed in large earthenware crocks; water is added and by treading them the pulp is made free to float. This is transferred to the vat with a large amount of the water.

The mould in which the paper is made consists of a large wooden frame in which is stretched a square of cloth, in some cases reeds take the place of the cloth. The frame is dipped flat in the vat, sufficient liquid is allowed to flow over the top to make one sheet of paper and it is then lifted out. The thickness re-required is controlled not by the amount permitted to enter the frame, but by the number of dips, two being generally sufficient, though in the better papers the frame is dipped three times, and it had been found that the increased number of dips adds to the strength of the paper. As the frame is lifted perfectly flat from the vat so the vacuum beneath sucks the water out and leaves the pulp only. The lumps which appear are now quickly removed or pressed in.

The sheets are taken from the mould and stacked one on the other until a block of seventy-two sheets is formed. On this is placed a board which is weighed down with stones. Next morning the sheets are detached from each other and spread out on a smooth mud wall to dry in the sun. Often five or six sheets are placed one on top of the other, being easily detached later on.

The paper is next polished with pumice stone after which its

surface is glazed with rice starch which is rubbed on both sides with a woollen mitt on the paper-maker's hand. Finally the writing paper is polished off with an agate or onyx stone, and is ready to take the pen.

George Forster, who wrote of his travels in Kashmir in 1783, says that he found there "fabricated the best writing paper of the East" and speaks of it as being "an article of extensive traffic".

In these days little Kashmir hand-made paper is to be seen, for it cannot compete with the mill-made paper, but I have yet to find any more effective for such things as Greeting Cards, while the heavier types make most effective lamp shades, being durable and toughened by the hemp fibre.

Woodwork and woodcarving have long been one of the industries of Kashmir. As to when it was commenced I have been unable to discover, other than that in ancient Hindu books there are directions for ensuring that the timber is felled in the winter month when the sap is down and just before it rises, and also as to how it should be seasoned for some years before it is cut up, and then allowed to season again in planks.

Earlier on has been described Khatamband—the geometric designs of pine-wood slips which fit into each other to decorate a ceiling and there are few of the houses of the well-to-do in Srinagar, or for that matter Kashmir, that do not boast of these: in some houses, such as the Residency, walnut was used for this purpose so that it might blend with the wall panels.

Next there is Pinjra or lattice work, in which Budlu or Kain wood is used with geometric or bold floral designs made up of small laths and pieces fitting one into the other and held by their own pressure, glue being despised, consequently the wood used for this art must be well seasoned. This particular type of woodwork is now dying out though.

Finally we come to woodcarving and the making of furniture. All will admit that the Kashmiri is surpassed by few in his designs and workmanship though it is still necessary to seek out the trader who has the financial backing to enable him to hold stocks of walnut long enough to ensure their being really well seasoned. Walnut trees abound in the valley. Those who have

lived there a lifetime admit that they cannot see any reduction in their number in spite of their fears at so many being used over the past years. The walnut's natural veined surfaces with lovely soft mellow colours, combined with the hardness of a wood which is ideal for both the knife of the carver and cloth of the polisher, makes it most suitable for these artists to work upon, while because of its easy and generous availability it is reasonably cheap, with the result that there are few articles of furniture to be found in any middle class household in the valley which are not manufactured from it. The woodworkers are able with ease and accuracy to copy a most elaborate design of desk, chair, bed or such-like piece from the photograph or sketch in a catalogue, each one coming apart, legs from base, so that they may be easily packed for transporting.

In his woodcarving the Kashmiri excels. The piece of wood is carefully selected to ensure that there is no blemish on its surface or in the hardness of the timber itself. If there happens to be a very soft part in an otherwise superb piece of wood, he will be careful to avoid this in the design. In the first place the artist-draughtsman chalks out with a black pencil the main design; again no instruments are used for this—it is all freehand work. The master woodcarver then hands it to an assistant who chisels out the bold shape, for instance in a flower and leaf design he would carve petals and leaves, the master afterwards taking over the rough-cut piece to carve out the small scrolls which form the base and the finer details, carefully covering any mistakes that have been made by his assistant.

With the finer pieces the one carver will execute the whole of the work, with wonderful skill and many shapes of knives hollowing out some parts, in others undercutting such shapes as flowers, leaves, and entwining creepers thread thin, or carving the much favoured dragon design, so that it is difficult to believe that this has not been separately cut and cunningly glued to the base, until on closely inspecting it one finds that it is not so.

Of late there has been an inclination to "stunt" pieces. It is said that this was originally in response to the demand of foreign soldiers during the last war, but now delights the Indian visitors, so that we find cigarette boxes which open on a spring,

at which the cigarette flies out, or a bird lifts it from the case; lamps made like lotus plants, the flowers of which open to expose the electric bulb and so on, but the pieces are not manufactured from well-seasoned wood, they are made for a cheap and ready market, and one wonders if they fall apart when the buyer returns to his own country.

No one can deny that with their fine embroidery work, their delightful blending of colours in their painting of papier mâché and their delicate woodcarving, the Kashmiri is an artist able to convey on to cloth, paper and wood the beauties with which he is surrounded by nature and of which lovely things he is truly conscious and appreciative: proof that familiarity has not dulled his vision to that which he lives amongst at all times. It is as if his one great desire is to let the whole world know of the joys that are his and to share with the rest of mankind all this colour and beauty.

To King Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din is also given the credit for having introduced sericulture into the valley although there are some who doubt this and it is difficult to trace the time when it did actually arrive, so that it must be sufficient that it is an ancient industry of Kashmir. There is a reference in the history written about the year 1548 by the then ruler Mirza Haidar to the great numbers of mulberry trees which were grown not so much for their fruits as for the leaves on which silkworms were fed, and scanty references to silkworms appear in Abdul Fazl's *Institutes of Akbar* and in *The Memoirs of Jahangir*. Under the Moghuls Kashmir's silk industry progressed, ladies of the Court delighting in wearing the materials while the men flung silken shawls and cloaks over their official uniforms even on the most important of ceremonial occasions. During the rule of the Pathans the industry died and the Sikhs made no effort to revive it although it would have contributed vast sums to the treasury, and it was not until the Dogra rulers came to the throne that they gave any encouragement to its reintroduction.

Then it must have reached great heights, for in 1855 there was a terrible outbreak of silkworm disease in Europe, and in 1860 the Italians purchased from Kashmir no less than twenty-five thousand ounces of the seed, as the eggs are called. The industry

was at that time under the control of the Maharaja's Chief Physician, Hakim Azim. Then something happened to the Kashmir seed, and there was a rapid decrease in production, until a Kashmiri who went to Kabul gathered together a few pounds of seed which he managed to smuggle into Kashmir by hiding them in walnut shells. In 1870, the Maharaja placed the industry under the charge of his Chief Justice, and four years later the State monopoly started.

It is amazing that thousands of ounces of seed are produced annually in the reproduction houses of the Kashmir Government silk factory. From time to time seed has been imported, Europe, France and Italy being the main suppliers, but the Kashmiri insists that the local seed is by far the better. They are always nervous of importing disease with the seeds, and to this day insist that the decline and final near-death from disease of the industry in 1878 was brought about by seeds which were imported from Japan. At that time there was a guild of silk-rearers which was known as "Kirm Kash", which translated means "worm-killers". Members of the guild enjoyed certain considerable privileges, most important of which was their exemption from forced labour under the State; they were permitted to requisition, without payment, any houses of the villagers that they required for the purpose of silk-breeding, and were appointed as informers of any damage done to mulberry trees. As usual they abused their position: as informers they were feared, as privileged persons they were hated for the advantages they had over their fellow countrymen, and they became as foreign to those among whom they were born and lived as were the military who had such power over the people.

In 1889, on the advice of Sir Edward Beck, it was decided to adopt the Pasteur system of microscopical examination. Good seed was obtained from France and Italy, and the resultant cocoons were excellent. The following year Sir Thomas Wardle a silk dyer and manufacturer who was the then President of the Silk Association of Great Britain, advised the Kashmir State through the Resident to revive the industry on a commercial basis, which advice they took.

In 1913, with the industry flourishing, there came the great fire which practically destroyed the factory; thousands were

thrown out of work and operations ceased. It was again rebuilt, new machinery of the most modern type was installed, being imported from Italy, with the result that it was decided by the British factories that the Kashmir silk had become superior to the Italian. From then on, until during the Great Wars when the demand for natural silk for making into parachutes was far in excess of the supply, it flourished, only to fade, although still existent, after the Kashmir troubles of 1947. Now fresh efforts are being made to revive it to its former glory of the past century.

There must be few who knew that in Srinagar there was, and probably will again be within a few years, the largest natural silk factory in the world. This is State run, the silk being the product of the millions of cocoons which are brought in by the rearers of silkworms from the villages of the valley, the eggs having been distributed to them by the State. Just as every village has its walnut trees, so almost all of them have their orchards of mulberry trees; these are cared for by the State which ensures that they are properly pruned and kept free from disease. At one time the factory employed about five thousand hands and a further one hundred and fifty thousand men, women and children profited by rearing the worms in the villages. Now the labourers are being encouraged to set up their own looms and mills in the villages.

To those who have no knowledge of silkworm culture—sericulture is the correct word—it is interesting to follow it through the separate stages in the factory; at first the selection of those cocoons which are the largest and have the finest silks; the hatching out of the moths, their separate matings in the trays, after which the male, having served his purpose in life, dies; the placing of each female in her own little muslin bag, in which she remains until she lays her eggs and serves her purpose. The dead moth is carefully examined under the microscope to ensure that she is not suffering from any of the diseases; the muslin bags are washed in a solution of copper sulphate and the seeds are removed to be packed in small boxes, each of which holds about one and a half ounces. These are set aside in the hybernating houses there to rest until they are ready for collection by the rearers the following season.

When they are about to hatch the peasant rearers collect them from the factory; from the eggs the grubs emerge to grow much like the common cabbage butterfly caterpillar, which gorge themselves on the mulberry leaves brought to them in their trays, the villagers keeping these in their houses. Finally, from thirty to thirty-five days from the time that they were hatched, the grubs spin their cocoons. These are carried by the rearers to the factory where they receive payment for them by weight.

The cocoons, which are naturally either white, gold or yellow, are then dropped into electrically heated basins of boiling water which immediately kills the grub within. The operator finds one end of the silken thread which he attaches to one of the dozens of whirling reels which are in line above the bowls, and the whole length of silk is unwound from the cocoon, there being from four to eight hundred yards on each.

In the old days the silk waste, that is the short ends of cocoons or those of a quality not sufficiently good to be used for weaving, were thrown away or sold for practically nothing. Now even this has found its use, and after cleaning and reeling—known as "Matka silk"—it is either woven into a second grade of cloth or used for making some of the really lovely silken carpets and rugs now coming out of the State.

The quality of Kashmir silk is considered good by the manufacturers of the Western world. The climate of the valley is most suited to the growth of the worm and the spinning of the yarn, much of which is exported in the skein, but some is woven on the old wooden looms. I have seen the factory in full pro-production, and unhappily I have also since seen it, together with some of the other private ones, and come upon empty rooms with machines silent, dusty, and some being cannibalised that the one or two which occasionally move may be kept going. That with the will, it can revive there is little doubt, in spite of the threatening competition of artificial silks now made from wood, coal and even glass. The food for the worms is there in the valley, as is labour at a price which compares favourably with other countries and the people are there who have a knowledge of its growth and manufacture, a knowledge which is hereditary. It is also fortunate that the diseases of silkworms known in the valley are fortunately controllable.

I suppose that next among the productions of the Kashmir craftsmen that attracts visitors, is the unique silverware. Most of this is of most exquisite design, the most favoured being the "shawl pattern", the engraving covering the entire silver piece on which the silversmith, sitting on the floor, works with chisel, hammer and file. The later designs contain the chinar leaf, but so clever are these craftsmen that they can most faithfully copy any piece given them as a pattern. Most of these workshops are in the dingy little shops on the banks of the Jhelum, more especially crowded round the third and fourth bridges. The finished article is sold by weight and it seems strange to the European when asking the price to see the silversmith place a teapot on one side of the scales and weights on the other after quoting his customer so many rupees and annas per tola—equal to about two ounces. The silver used is either imported from India in ingots or melted down silver rupees.

This silverware has a peculiar white sheen attributable to its being boiled in apricot juice. Unfortunately when the modern liquid silver polishes are used on it there is a tendency to tarnish especially when afterwards handled. The outer surface is highly polished by the silversmith; that part which is engraved, although bright, is not polished and appears to be whiter.

Most of the tea and coffee sets, finger bowls, fruit dishes, biscuit barrels, tea caddies, mugs and trays are made to supply the needs of visitors, although they will also be seen in some of the better-class Kashmiri houses.

Other silversmiths specialise in making ornaments for the people who live there. It is said that the Empress Nur Jahan introduced into the Valley many delicate varieties of jewellery. The Kashmiri excels in the making of earrings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, amulets, rings, rosaries, charm cases and headbands, and in all of them is to be seen the Moghul influence, yet there remains that small detail which distinguishes them from the pieces which come from the shops of India or Pakistan.

On any day you will see the little girls, many of them in arms, wearing the unique silver pieces which cover the head and are made up of a number of cut-out silver medallions held together like chain armour, with a fringe of tiny darts falling over the forehead, the more delicate of these being shaped like fishes,

birds and flowers. The Muslim peasant women always wear dozens of silver earrings hanging and dragging open the pierced holes in the lobes; then to take the weight, a wire is passed over the crown of the head. The Hindu women wear beautiful jhumkas—bell-shaped earrings with little drops and a silver or gold fringe. Wide, hinge-closing, solid, fitting bracelets of silver, embossed with chinar leaves, cherry and almond blossoms are a favourite, some have semi-precious stones such as jade, green and pink, agate, turquoise, goldstone, cornelians or bloodstones, embedded in the surface. As a necklace these women wear massive silver charm boxes, or triangular silver pendants suspended on a black cord which matches the hundreds of plaits of raven hair hanging round their heads after the fashion in that part. This silver is often the entire family fortune.

The shopkeepers discovered that visitors were attracted to these rather barbaric ornaments, and since for some reason they always seek out "very old pieces", they supply that need by burying them in the earth for a time sufficient to acquire that antique look, rubbing them very carefully afterwards to ensure the dirt remains in the crevices. The customer well knows that she is being cheated so that she in turn will be able to deceive her friends who will later admire the antique piece.

Quite a number of synthetic emeralds, sapphires and rubies are brought into the country for setting into this jewellery, yet emeralds, sapphires and amethyst are to be found within the State.

The most perfect of these real stones are to be seen in some of the dainty and delicately designed gold ornaments which are worn on special occasions by the wealthier Muslim and Hindu ladies, jewellery which has probably been passed down to them through several generations. Yet every goldsmith knows just where each of his masterpieces is, and is able, by examining a piece of jewellery, to tell if it was made by one of his forefathers, such is the individual work which is put into every bit that comes out of those dismal little workshops.

To these craftsmen of Kashmir such things as mass production and machine-made goods are unknown, and in this lies so

much of the charm of that which one buys. Each piece is a model, and has become as though possessed of a soul whilst being fashioned by human hands. All are carved, made or painted by men who really love and are proud of their work, men who are masters of their craft, one which has come down to them from the distant past, men who handle the finished article as though reluctant to part with it. Unlike the factory hands who—other than for the pay packet—have little interest in that which they make, these men are artists, they do not clock in and clock out; often they will work far into the night, forgetful of the hour as they concentrate upon that piece which they are producing.

What one can never understand is how such beauty of shape and perfect blending of colours can be created and made complete in those dirty, squalid, poverty-stricken surroundings; maybe those who so labour have but near and far sight, that they can only see that material, wood, metal or papier mâché on which they work, and in the distance the glorious shades of Kashmir's lakes, hills and mountains, together with the beauties of her trees, flowers and birds.

CHAPTER TEN

The Trip to Gulmarg

In spite of its elevation, since the valley of Kashmir nestles within a ring of mountains, during the height of the summer the temperature, combined with the humidity, drives many of its visitors higher up into the mountains to the *margs* or mountain meadows of which there are many; some of these for many years now have, with their wooden huts, electricity and water laid on, held foreigners longer in Kashmir than they had at first intended, and in some cases they have lingered into the winter months or arrived in the early spring to enjoy the same snow sports as are offered in the Alps or Rockies.

The many *margs* are much the same one as the other in their formation. It is as though the water had at some distant time been at a much higher level over the country and suddenly found its escape, leaving the silt partly to fill those valleys from which there was no escape; this over the ages becoming covered with grass and flowers. Legend tells that in the far off times when the bad demon, which the goddess Parvati crushed with a stone, lived in the valley, the waters were indeed deep. During the course of years when good and bad fought each other, the last grandson of the god Brahma came to the valley to live an ascetic life for one thousand years, after which he challenged the bad demon to fight, but the bad one refused and hid himself in the deep water, upon which the gods struck the mountains at Baramula—where the Jhelum escapes through a deep narrow gorge—and the valley was drained dry. So we may imagine that it was at this time that the silt was left to remain in those valleys from which it could not escape with the water—hence the *margs*.

The most popular and best known of these is Gulmarg, the

charm of which was discovered in 1580 by Yusaf Khan, "that ruler who gave himself up to pleasure", and it has remained a pleasure ground and holiday resort ever since, though the months during which it is used have now extended from early spring until early winter.

Gulmarg is about twenty-eight miles from Srinagar, the motor road to it branching off about eight miles out from the main Srinagar to Baramula highway, which like most roads in the State is just over a car's width but with run-overs, hard in the summer, but boggy in the winter, these being made up of dirt dug from the mud bank on which most of the road is built. I well remember my first trip there, it was in the spring and we had two punctures with wheels to be changed in the roadside mud. Starting off soon after breakfast, we passed on the way dozens of doodh-wallahs—that is, milk men—returning from the city to their small holdings, they were walking along the road each with a great earthenware jar balanced on his shoulder, one more hanging behind and a smaller one in front. These were now empty, but when full they must have been a heavy load; no wonder that the few we met going into the city were proceeding at a steady trot; what surprises me is that the milk had not turned to butter by the time it got there. The stopper to the jar is just a twist of straw, and the smaller jar usually contains cream, curds or ghee.

Just over a long wooden bridge, at an especially narrow part of the road where the trees also were close, we came on dozens of women sitting with baskets in front of them selling large onions, the price of which was ridiculously low. Later the road widened out, a field distant from it were largish farmyards, with houses, barns and store houses all bundled on top of one another, and surrounded as usual by poplars; the farmers were prosperous, being able to dispose of their produce in the nearby city with little cost for transport. The road was now lined with poplars, the older ones close upon it, the newly planted further back, some even behind the dyke which ran on either side of the banked up road. Dozens of tongas were coming and going; old ones which were overflowing with village folk who for a few annas are able to travel miles, crowded tight within them, the driver sitting on the side of the shaft, the women

always with babies which seemed as though they would at any moment slip from their mothers' knees as they appeared to be ever breast-feeding them, making no effort to grip the child tighter as the tonga was taken by its skinny, tired horse off the road on to the bumpy side as we passed.

We turned off on to the Tangmarg road, one which is lined with great poplars appearing to go on and on in two endless rows. Most of these had long since died and now, shed of their bark, stood like white tombstones to giants of the past; the driver said that later on they would be bought up by the match-makers. It was a wonder to me that the people had not sawn them up for firewood during the winter months. The fields of corn were red with poppies, others yellow with mustard plants, the oil of which is extracted when the beans have ripened. Further on the fields ended; it then seemed as though we were driving through the bed of a giant spread of a dried-up river, for not a blade of grass was to be seen except for that on the roadside, the rest being large smooth stones.

After a while, with the road the whole time going slightly up hill, we came on houses surrounded and protected by walls of these loose stones, then on past rice fields, all of which seemed to be flooded; they looked like ripple-sand on a flattish seashore after the tide had gone out, being in layers, gradually rising one above the other, and of all shapes and sizes, not in neat squares, but with their dividing walls in scrolls, being made of built-up earth reinforced with more of the smooth stones. Some were even then green with the young shoots of rice, in others men, women and children were working almost knee-deep in water, bending down and replanting the rice plants, while a few men were behind the small wooden ploughs which were being drawn through the earth lost nearly a foot beneath the water's surface, the little bullocks up to their bellies in the slush; how the man at the plough follows his furrows is inexplicable to me. There were hundreds of these small paddy fields going almost as far as we could see. The extraordinary thing was that we heard singing, and, stopping, found that it was the workers who were giving voice to their hopes for the coming season; I knew that they had suffered much from the lack of sufficient food during the past hard winter.

Water poured through a gap made from each paddy field into the lower one, being fed by streams which come down from the mountains behind, pretty, bubbling, sparkling brooks which ran joyfully over the stones as though delighted to be doing their best to join in with the happiness of the singing planters. Here and there they fell in great waterfalls from the grey rocks, then with banks of stones were led down near to the road, in some places high as though over an aqueduct of stones and branching off into tiny silver streams at places to feed the fields, dropping terrace after terrace as each had been flooded.

While the fields were being prepared, the paddy, as the rice seed complete in its husk is called, is soaked and put in germinating pots for about a week; this happens at the beginning of May; then it is sown in a small patch of ground which is always kept flooded near to the farmhouse. When a foot high it is taken out to be transplanted in the fields, work which must be completed by the middle of June.

Still ascending we came upon hamlets which seemed as though they were being pushed on to the road, with a few houses, a row of open-fronted shops, always a stream running close by, and dozens of children of whom the many old men sitting around took no notice, even when a tiny mite almost ran under the car. Then there were the country people waiting for the 'bus which went to Srinagar, one which was not considered full until the passengers were being pushed out of the window and the driver refused to take a higher load on the roof; the 'bus also carried a portable pillar box at the back, this being cleared at the end of the journey.

We came on what was to be the last rows of poplars, tall, straight and in their prime. On the right side of the road there were more paddy fields and orchards, on the left a steep slope down to many fields and little brown-roofed villages in the valley below. Across in the distance dark green firs covered the slopes of the mountains, the tips of which were white with snow and sharply set off against the clear blue sky.

Firs took the place of poplars by the roadside. Suddenly we came upon the village of Tangmarg with rows of wooden shops and garages, and hundreds of coolies and ponies. It was still warm there although we had now reached an altitude of seven

thousand feet. As soon as we stopped we were surrounded by a seething mass of coolies and pony men, for we were the day's first arrivals and consequently were almost mobbed by those anxious to serve us before the coach loads of visitors arrived, there always being the chance that bad weather or something untoward would result in but a few visitors.

Fortunately two more cars arrived and the flood turned on them leaving us the breathing space and time to pick our ponies and coolies, for there are over three miles to go up the pony track in order to climb the two thousand feet to Gulmarg. Tangmarg is a pretty little place with several charmingly designed and beautifully situated houses of residents who prefer it to Gulmarg for the spring and winter seasons.

By the time we had decided whether we would have a pack pony or a couple of coolies to carry our bed rolls etc., the other party had moved off ahead of us; only then, as I looked at them from behind, did I realize how thin and narrow were the horses, and sorted them over for those which we should not be ashamed to be seen on by our friends.

The track is hard and wide as it zig-zags up the hillside, with the coolie track cutting across it, taking a shorter and steeper path. The men, wearing little more than the rags of filthy clothes, consisting of baggy trousers, with shirts over them, skull caps and always the one other possession, a blanket over their shoulders, were mostly without footwear; just a few usually with tied up, injured toes, wore grass sandals. Their loads were tied with rope rather loosely to their backs and held round the forehead as they moved forward in a stooping position, seldom resting, but reaching the top to await us although we were mounted.

The track is through firs and pines, the scent of which inpregnates the air with its freshness, the foliage a deep green, the trunks of the trees mottled pink and straight, the ground beneath them brown with millions of fir needles on which were scattered hundreds of bronze pine cones.

Some of the pines had slices hacked out from their trunks where men of the land have made with the piece a torch to light themselves through the forest on their way home on dark nights, for the pine is full of rosin; many a peasant's

house is lighted at night by using a sliver of the wood as a candle.

Most of the way the track is so wide that a small car might use it but for the sharp hairpin bends. Often there is a little stream which bounces down over the stones, with white, pink and yellow flowers edging it, the small islands smothered with the blooms. The ponies knew the road far better than their riders, and I found it best most of the way to give mine his head until he insisted on following a muddy track which was too close on the seemingly loose edge of a precipice.

We passed those of the other party who were resting to admire the glorious distant views of snow-capped mountains above the deep green of the slopes. Their horses were second class grade, for which they paid Rs. 1 As. 4. against our Rs. 1. As. 8., a difference of fourpence for the journey, and they were tired. One of the party was an old woman who was being carried up in a "dandi chair", which is a kind of hammock chair in which the occupant is carried facing backwards, the head portion being suspended on a pole carried by two or more men, the feet likewise, and these poles the "dandi men" carry across their shoulders, ox fashion. The old woman was frail and four men could lift her with ease, but as we came down the hill we passed a fat old man using one, and eight coolies were earning every anna of what they would receive at the top of the hill.

Half way up we came to an open space of bright green grass with a gentle slope from a row of firs under which our syces—or horsemen—sat awaiting us, for they had taken the coolie track which runs straight up the face of the khud as soon as they saw that we were "knowing riding". They had been there almost a quarter of an hour, and grinned as we tried to get the horses to go on, for the animals refused, this being their regular half way halt for a rest.

From here the view was superb looking towards the distant mountains through a valley of blue and deep green pines, cedars and firs. Tight, woolly clouds were drifting over the far mountain tops and, finding a space between them, the sun's rays were then streaming down on the snow-field which seemed to take on a tinge of pearl pink against the blue of the sky beneath the

clouds. The whole time the pine scent remained with us, the cool air felt fresh and clean as the gentle breeze just lightly fanned us. The horses started to munch the grass; this seemed to be a signal to the syces that we could now move on, and we remounted.

It takes about an hour and a half to climb the hill, an hour to descend it. As we reached the summit, we turned a twist in the road and there spread out before us was a great space of undulating greens, almost a crescent shape about two miles long and in places half a mile wide, the whole surrounded by firs, which seemed to be holding back the curtain so that we could gaze upon the lovely *marg* of emerald green grass. The name Gulmarg means "meadow of roses", though some prefer that the translation should be "the meadow of flowers". In all probability it was in the springtime that the ruler who was permitted to discover it first set eyes on the *marg*, and as was then the fashion with kings, the great man's first words of admiration gave the place its name.

Since his time the rulers have always had a palace or a house there. The surrounding woodlands bordering on the *marg* are dotted with what are described as "huts" but in many cases are delightful bungalows and houses, hotels, a club and a cinema; banks, boarding houses and shops open branches there; all are built of wood, the only stonework being in some cases the foundations and the chimney pieces which are made of stone held by mud cement in which pine needles bind it firmly. The roofs are mostly of wood, many with earth, again bound with pine needles. On one side is the bazaar or shopping centre, but unlike other Kashmir bazaars, it is clean and tidy, with the shops in blocks of three or four having living-rooms over them.

The modern town planner would look at Gulmarg and turn his horse's head to go back to Tangmarg, for other than with the bazaar, there is not a straight road to be seen, not one house level with the next, and there is no excuse for this other than that those who live there seek beauty. In Gulmarg the roads have been made in lovely curves; the stream which runs to one side gently flows in the same bed that it has followed for hundreds of years; an ugly hill has been ornamented by a charming little church; behind it a bungalow-type hotel sprawls lazily over

another hillock; in the great open space is the polo ground, no ugly fence encloses it; two golf courses spread themselves over the remainder of the greens on which sheep and goats graze, and round which riders canter to take their exercise. In late spring this green is a mass of flowers, daisies, iris, violets, forget-me-nots and narcissus. In early spring the woodlands, especially those close to the many little brooks in the dells, are carpeted with the flowers that love shade and water, and others that shyly hide under the trees, their colours, pinks, mauves and blues; at the same time the flowering shrubs of which I do not know the names, are a mass of blossom, deep reds, yellows and white.

One side is flanked by a snow-capped mountain range with Apharwat, the highest, right above Gulmarg; over the top of this and on the further side are the Frozen Lakes. Then there is the snow-capped Tos Maidan; in the far distance behind that the peaks of Kantar Nag standing bare between cold white snow-fields before it and the blue sky beyond. From our hut we could look down on the valley through which we had come and on towards the distant summits of Haramouk, Kotwal, Mahadeo, with Nanga Parbat, the ninth highest mountain in Asia, rising to a height of twenty-six thousand, six hundred and twenty feet some ninety miles away to the north and towering above them all.

During our week at Gulmarg we rode up to Khillenmarg since we wanted to reach the snow line. It is nearly four miles from Gulmarg, and over fifteen hundred feet above it with a road which is little more than a cattle track: the ride is delightful, through tall straight firs. We came upon two small meadows in our climb; some shepherd's huts had been built at the far side of one, but no smoke came from near them; the occupants had already moved higher with the spring. We went on until we came out on to the *marg* which is smaller and flatter than Gulmarg and with no signs of habitation; but it is well named, for at that time there were hundreds of goats grazing there and Khillenmarg means "the meadow of goats". Boys were watching their herds and flocks, either sitting in twos and threes talking like old men, or sleeping; one quite alone and tending sheep was playing to himself a tune on a whistle. At the upper

end we found great beds of *neve*—frozen snow—and on these were the runner marks of toboggans. We had arranged to climb higher before having our lunch. The firs had begun to thin out and above the tree belt we came on clumps of flowers which were even thrusting their heads through the crisp white as we eventually came upon the snow line.

Here we found the syces waiting for us; they had been there a long time wrapped in their blankets. We dismounted, pulled on sweaters, and sat down to eat a pack lunch, glad of the flasks of coffee, the whole time enjoying the glorious distant view of the whole Kashmir Valley, which lay like a relief map backed by grand distant mountains and leaving us to argue as to whether the river we saw was really the Jhelum, and if so which way it was flowing.

Then mounting again we started down the hill road, the syces leaving us immediately to take the steep coolie track down to the *marg*. As we eventually came out to the thinning trees upon its edge, we saw them sitting looking towards the grass-covered space. Not far away was a herd of goats nibbling the young green leaves from the branches which a boy up aloft was hacking off and dropping to them. The men were not looking in that direction though; both their, and now our attention was attracted to some boys in a distant hollow who were laughing and yelling with delight. They also had a few goats with them, one of the shepherd boys was standing behind one of these and holding it firmly by the horns. A huge billy-goat was dancing and prancing before them on its hind legs, then suddenly frisking and putting his head down he charged at the head of the goat being held captive; there was a dull thud, a yell from the boy holding it and shrieks of delight from those watching. As I trotted towards them to stop what I had guessed to be a counterpart of the old English cock-fight, one of the lads saw me coming, warned the others, and all fled with the billy-goat racing after them, but the other goat remained with its four feet firmly on the ground, and as I came upon it I saw that it was not another billy, but a nanny.

I turned towards the syces, but they were already up on their feet and with their backs towards me were on their way down the coolie path to Gulmarg; then when some distance off I saw

them look back over their shoulders, and turning to each other, burst into peals of laughter.

These shepherds only speak Kashmiri, and in that language a dialect of their own in the hills which they never leave even to go to Srinagar, so that I never did discover whether the long silken-haired goats in the herds on Khillenmarg and Gulmarg were kept for their milk, their meat, their wool or their skins. There were goats and sheep of all ages, the breeding flocks not being kept separate, and the kids and lambs ran with the others.

The shepherd boys' clothes were much like the coolies', being made up of a cloth so coarse and hard that it might have been sacking. It was filthy, I doubt if it had ever seen soap, and as you got near to them the boys smelt almost as strong as the billy-goats, for after they bath in the stream, they put on their filthy clothes again, and I am assured that during the winter months they never take off their clothes to bath; those clothes in which they also sleep.

Their ignorance not only of the outside world but generally, is appalling; partly because of this their intelligence is low, their education has been nil, their one aim in life from the time they can walk and talk is to be shepherds like their fathers; their standard of living is almost the lowest in the land, a land where the average is below that of a house-dog in the Western world.

The sheep and goats have mostly been brought up by the shepherds from the villages in the valley where they have wintered and remained to drop their young; then as the snow clears from the mountains, the shepherds—or *chaupans* as they are called—collect from the farmer those of his flock that he wishes away, and move to the hills, folding them each night on the unsown rice fields, for which service the farmer pays him well.

Occasionally, when the work in the fields is light, one of the farmers will carry up salt for the sheep and goats, at the same time inspecting the flocks, for the shepherds are of a different tribe, never marrying with the village people and never trusting them or being trusted by them. The skin of a sheep which dies or has been killed must be produced for inspection by the farmer, otherwise the shepherd has to pay him a fine which in the old days was half a rupee, but is now one rupee; little enough

for the meat of a sheep which the shepherds might kill to eat amongst themselves. They are entitled to certain perquisites, such as the butter and ghee made from the milk. With the autumn the flocks return to the villages when the shepherd's wages are paid in coin and grain, the latter because while he has been in the hills tending the flocks he has been unable to grow his own. He is entitled to the shearings of one sheep in every thirty or forty, according to the district, and to one sheep or goat in every fifty if he returns with the flock intact. If he has lost many sheep, the people of the village, who are entirely in his hands, will probably insist that he takes an oath as he stands either beside the shrine of the village saint, or under what is known as the tree of ordeal, the headman of the village or the farmer reminding him of the awful things that have in the past happened to those who lied after such oaths.

The shepherd goes and the sheep find plenty of good food in the village, for the leaves are falling from the trees and those of the mulberry are always a great favourite with them. With the farmer's work in the fields now done and the harvest gathered, he washes his flock in the river, pond or lake, and as each one of the sheep come from the water, one holds the animal while another roughly rubs—almost hacks—its heavy woollen coat down with a half-hoop of iron which has a handle at either end. Then, as for hundreds of years before, when the sun enters Libra, the shearings are done.

Three months later, after they have again been sheared, the sheep are crowded into their winter pen on the ground floor of the house, there to be fed on willow leaves and the sweet dried leaves of the iris which have been gathered for them during the late summer.

The wool will be sorted over and washed in the stream, the first dirt being stamped out of it by the men, the second by the women who wash it with greater care, afterwards spinning it on their wooden spinning wheels, and then with the winter confining the family to the house, much of it is woven into cloth either for blankets or lengths of cloth for sale in the city; many of the blankets which find their way there during the summer having been used the previous winter in the villages and then washed.

Although the quality of the wool is good, it is a pity that the Kashmiri does not weave closer, and that he does not wash the wool better, for although I have had suits made of the village cloth, many have pulled out of shape and there remains something in the wool which attracts the moth and "woolly bear".

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Pilgrimage to the Cave of Amarnath

IN the mosque containing a hair of the Prophet, the Muslims of Kashmir have their greatest shrine; the Buddhists travel to Ladakh to offer their prayers in the most important of their monastery chapels, but Kashmir also has within its borders one of the most amazing and sacred of Hindu temples, one created by God and untouched by the hand of man, one in which orthodox Hindus believe are enshrined the "living" symbols of one of their greatest gods and his divine lady, one as important and telling much the same story of the creation as does the Garden of Eden to the Christians and the Jews; one on the road to which thousands of Hindu pilgrims in the past have made their last journey. It is to them what Bethlehem is to the Christians, Rome to the Catholics and Mecca to the Muslims.

I was fortunate in the arrangements for my trip there, in having become friendly with a Hindu who, after spending most of his life in England, was visiting India for the first time that he could remember. He was as soft as I for trekking, and although holding to the same belief in "the way of life" as those others who made the pilgrimage, had no wish to go on his two legs. He had therefore made elaborate arrangements for the journey, but on the last evening the friend who was to go with him, fell sick and I agreed to take his place, so that the only thing I had to do was to pack my warmest clothing.

The sixty miles to Pahalgam we covered by car; a few pilgrims today make even that part of the journey on foot; in the past all did. Pahalgam is a smaller edition of Gulmarg with hotel, shops, post office and houses, and is fast becoming popular as a holiday resort, although at only seven thousand feet—the same as Tangmarg which is at the foot of Gulmarg.

A Shikara, the gondola of Kashmir

After a comfortable night at the hotel, we started off on our pilgrimage at the crack of dawn, both of us, as well as his cook-bearer, being well mounted and followed by a string of three good pack ponies; in all they were the best I saw the whole way. The head ponyman-cum-guide and his five men were happy, for they had been promised double rates providing the marches were increased in length; we took three and a half days to cover the ground—mostly ice and snow—a journey usually taking a week of travel.

The thirty-five miles from Pahalgam to the sacred cave at Amarnath, moving higher and higher in the eternal snows of the Himalayan mountains until one is at over thirteen thousand feet, is hard going even for a horse, the path being over rocks and boulders, fording swift streams and crossing snow bridges, not once, but many times, and most of the way the cold is intense. Fortunately there are havens of rest on the way, green-covered open spaces, but no rest houses, indeed they would be useless to the thousands who trudge there especially to arrive for the night of the full moon of the month of Shravan—this falls sometime in July or August and according to the *Vaishnava* calendar is called *Jhulan Paurnamasi*, translated meaning "the swing full moon". From September to June the road is covered with snow, so that it is indeed fortunate that this time of the year was chosen for the pilgrimage.

At about mid-day, after winding along the tree-covered track near to the milky waters of the Dudh Ganga river, we reached Chandanwari. Here on the edge of the forest and overshadowed by protecting cliffs and crags, many had encamped for the night; the whole place was one mass of tents, smoke was rising from among them, and hundreds of people where moving about. We stopped a little further on for a light meal and to rest the horses. By that time we had already climbed well over two thousand feet, and the going had not been too bad. I had crossed my first snow bridge on the way, it arched across a steep, swift, hill torrent.

During the afternoon we climbed a further fifteen hundred feet; here the meadows were already a mass of floral colour. Although it was not one of the resting places as laid down in the guide books, we camped here, as did many others. Not till then

had I seen our equipment. The tent was unrolled, up in position and furnished well within half an hour. A standard type as used by trekkers in the valley, it gave eight by six feet of floor space, its ceiling being suspended a foot beneath a fly tent which also provided a large verandah cover over the front entrance, a half-circle bathroom behind it, and with eaves extending more than two feet on both sides. This, together with the canvas floor covering and the three poles, had been the load for one pack horse. Another carried our shikara beds, bed rolls, two canvas chairs and a table, an oil can, hurricane lamps and wash basin. Yet another had been loaded with food for the journey together with the few cooking pots and other implements needed by the cook-bearer who provided us with reasonably good meals the whole way.

At the halt I was able to see my fellow travellers. I do not think that there were many who were mere tourists like myself. They came from all parts of India and a great percentage were long past the half way in their lives; perhaps many had reached the age when man begins to think of the hereafter, or fears that unless he undertakes the pilgrimage that year the next will be too late. A few had tents like ours, but there were very few; most had improvised them from pieces of cane and rags. There was one though which might have been made to cover the throne of a prince; it was about four feet square and at least nine feet high with a canopy which spread out to the ground like a full skirt made of striped material; the top was pointed. I looked for a small pennant, for it reminded one of the pictures of the Crusaders' tents, but there was none. When I went over to it I found it housed a sadhu who was then sitting cross-legged on a leopard skin spread on the ground, and looking into the distance; in his lap rested a sacred book, he wore only a loin cloth, his hair was matted and had turned from black to ginger colour from the smoke of the burning incense bowls—some say that this is also brought about by it being washed in cows' urine—and he took no notice of my approach. They told me that this ascetic—a handsome young man of fine physique and intelligent countenance—had not spoken for the past seven moons, during which time he had fasted of food and water during the hours of daylight, this being a self-imposed undertaking in order to

obtain purification of both mind and body. These he would continue until he set eyes on the sacred emblems placed high in that mountain of the Himalayas; only then would his tongue be loosened, only then would he break his fast to eat and drink whilst the sun was in the heavens.

Behind him was another tent much like ours but a little larger; they told me that it was that of a Government Minister from India and that the sadhu was his own private priest whom he consulted on all occasions when he was confounded by some issue. In a little while the mist turned to a cold rain which increased to a downpour as I got back to our tent; by then many of the pilgrims must have been drenched. Near us were some saffron-robed priests from Madras; their clothes were clinging to their lean forms, yet although they had umbrellas these were required to protect the fire on which their meal was then being cooked, not their own fires, but those of pilgrims nearby who were only too happy to share their meagre meal with the priests who had given them the opportunity and privilege to perform a good deed before they slept that night. Later on I watched some Kashmiri coolies—Muslims of course—teaching these Hindu priests how to make grass sandals, for those they wore consisted of a flat piece of wood the shape of the foot, with a peg standing up from it, this fitting between the big and first toes. No one seemed to have warned these holy men of the rigours of the journey—maybe it is considered right that they should not further protect themselves from the cold though—I do not know. I found that our tent covered all of our men, the cook-bearer installing himself in the bathroom for the night and the others sleeping under the fly tent flap; from the mumbling that went on and the stench of wet clothes, I suspect that many others also joined them once they imagined we were asleep.

The following morning was fine with the bright sun shining through the clear air and the sky a deep blue. Already most of the tents had been, or were being folded up and a string of pilgrims were moving on upwards a further seven miles. The road is not easy, the way is slippery and the pines and firs become less and less, but the glorious view of the snow peaks is ahead. The climb is about fifteen hundred feet, with the river in a

chasm way down a thousand feet below. There were grassy slopes, *margs* on both sides and snow bridges across the river; as we approached these I realized how risky these can be and that later in the season, say in September, they would fall through, yet when you are passing over them the ground is so much the same as that round about, that you are unaware of their existence. Here again there was a large camp; some pilgrims seemed to have only just arrived and were already settling down near to the copses of birch and under the firs, gathering fuel and fetching water. Here we left the route and climbed up to see the Sona Sar lake, a pretty sheet of water overhung by glaciers, then going back to the valley and on up a steep and rocky ascent for nearly a thousand feet to grassy spurs and Shisha Nag lake, a great expanse of water which is five miles long and two miles wide at a height of twelve thousand feet and covered with ice until June. When we gazed upon it its colour was an emerald green, shot with the reflected blue of the sky and white of the surrounding mountain tops. There still remained small floating islands of snow-covered ice, which appeared like swans proudly swimming in this magnificent scene of grandeur, the mountains always topped with snow, with cascades rushing down and making it like trains of the finest white muslin being wafted in the breeze. Here we camped the night; again it was cold, but no rain came and we had a fire made from the wood gathered there—juniper which gave off a strange odour in the smoke. An Indian doctor who had pitched his tent near ours was telling us of its valuable medicinal qualities, first the many uses of the berries and then of the smoke, which choked us as it came our way, which he declared would relieve, if not cure asthma, but for this the wood must be cut with the sap up.

On the other side of the track were a number of tents outside which was a board "Medical Camp". The State here provides free medical attention to the pilgrims, for at this height those who are frail begin to feel the severity of the journey. On our way we had passed a number of dandi chairs in which old people were being carried up by coolies; when near to the present camp we had come on a palanquin—an enclosed bed slung on two poles and carried on the shoulders of four carriers.

I watched it being taken over to the medical tent where one of the white-coated doctors went to it; when the curtains were drawn I saw inside a withered old woman; she appeared to have no flesh, just skin on bones; she had a screech-owl voice and appeared far from sick in spite of her emaciated condition, for she sat up excitedly and almost spat her words at the doctor as she fiddled with claw-like hand beneath a cushion to produce a phial from which she demanded that he gave her an injection. He tested her with his stethoscope, then took her pulse and finally examined the phial. After this he shook his head, refusing to do as she demanded of him. At this she spat more words at him and called forward one of the men who was with her; he at once gave her an injection, using a syringe which he took from a begrimed box.

The State also posts coolies at certain places along the route; they are there to clear the road in the event of a landslide, or to shovel away the snow if an avalanche falls, an occurrence which is not unknown. At one place there is pointed out the "Lake of Death", so named after forty pilgrims had been plunged into it by a falling avalanche which was brought about by the vibration of their voices joyously raised in the singing of hymns as together they progressed on what was to be their last journey, the pilgrimage completed.

Our doctor tent neighbour went over to the medical camp to offer his help if it was required whilst he was at that halt, and referring to the old woman they declared that although she was then so alert, they would be surprised if she reached the end of the pilgrimage alive, she had been overdosed with drugs; in any case the phial she wished used had been unsealed. Inside the tents were patients who begged that the doctors might quickly make them able to continue the journey even though it meant that they died at the end; some had legs or arms broken from falls on the ice or snow; they were fortunate in not having broken their necks; many they attended admitted that they had been warned by their own doctors not to undertake the pilgrimage; others had brought on sickness by martyring themselves, making the journey on bare feet or by such-like physical suffering. They told us of one we should pass who had declared he would undertake the journey on hands and knees from the

time that he first saw the cave. I made no comment (how could I?) for, but a few years ago, I had seen women with tears in their eyes and prayers on their lips, in a church in Rome climbing on hands and knees up the glass-covered steps on which were marked by crosses the supposed blood drops which had fallen from Jesus Christ's thorn-covered head as we went forward to the cross.

At night there came the glow of hundreds of cooking fires, the flicker of torches, many of which moved from place to place with those who clasped them: over the air came the sound of horns and of conch-shells being blown by the sadhus, the mumbling and chanting of prayers and singing of hymns in chorus. The faces of the pilgrims revealed their devotion to the task which they had set themselves, none even smiled at the strange lack of clothing of the ash-covered sadhus who seemed immune to the bitter cold as they sat on the ground cross-legged before a brass pot from which rose the smoke and scent of smouldering sandalwood and incense; without expression on their features they first touched the white cold ashes and then the forehead of some pilgrim who had come up to bend before them that this form of blessing might be bestowed on them before they slept the night through.

Next day there was the stony road over the fourteen thousand feet high pass; this crosses the watershed to the head waters of the Sind river; here there was still a little snow, but between the patches the luscious green grass showed itself. We had to ford the river four times on our way down to Panjitarni; it was there a swift deep torrent, so that we came on faltering parties wondering if they dare cross and at such places we were glad of our excellent horses, and did the double journey to carry over two elderly women with us, but on our return their far older menfolk refused to come with us, insisting that they must perform the whole pilgrimage on foot, so that having separated them we had no alternative but to leave them.

What amazes the tourist who like myself makes the journey out of interest and not as a pilgrimage, is that more do not die on the way. To me it seemed as though many were determined that they should not return, for in so many of the ice cold streams and rivers one would see pilgrims of all ages taking the prescribed

religious baths; the sadhus never failed to do so, afterwards smearing their scraggy shivering bodies with the mud from the banks.

Ahead of us we could see the bare, cold Amarnath mountain rising majestically; beneath us in the valley were hundreds of pilgrims trailing persistently on and looking like ants moving over the base of a wedding cake; looking to the east the mountains have a most unusual formation like vertical ribbing and with the setting of the sun it appears even more curious. Ice formations, which one suddenly realizes are really glaciers, reach down to the same level.

There follows what is described in guide books as "the most difficult part of the journey, a steep ascent of a mile and a half". From then on a new path has been discovered to the cave, this is easier and less dangerous than the original one, yet most who go insist that the first discovered is the true pilgrim's road, although on this one side is at times a vertical wall, the other a sheer drop to apparent nothingness. We did not take it; had we done so we should probably have come upon the pilgrim who had sworn to cover it on hands and knees, for there is little doubt that like others he would have gone that way imagining he would gain additional merit by his sufferings. Even then we had to pass through a close passage, wondering if the pack horses would get through, and being held back by the many pilgrims, some by now sick and ill with the cold, proceeding wearily on foot over the hard, frozen snow, perhaps wondering how much longer the road could possibly be, how much more they must suffer. But as we got nearer our destination the track straightened, on either side were the mountains known as Kailash and Bhairo which have the most unusual sharp-rough tops, looking like the low-tide picture of some long-past wrecked steamer, after the sea had eroded its iron sides, standing above the surface of the water; looking for a longer time at them one picks out the white waterfalls rushing down, then the picture changes to become an evil giant's dripping mouth. The rock sides are of that reddish-yellow tint beloved of the Hindus, worn by many of the sadhus, and considered to be almost a holy colour. It is fitting that it should surround this sacred place of their homage and worship.

And finally comes the slope of about a hundred feet, up through the massing pilgrims to the cave of Amarnath.

The date of its discovery by man is unknown, it must have been thousands of years ago if the writer of the *Rajatarangini* is correct in his account of a pilgrimage in the time of King Nara who reigned over a thousand years B.C. One can only imagine that some lone shepherd with his lost flock must have wandered to that elevated spot—there are to this day many such wandering shepherds always in search of a good feeding ground—that he may have been drawn there by the bleat of a sheep or goat, or even have taken shelter from the rain. One can imagine that his mind was filled with thoughts of the gods who from his childhood he knew lived high in those mountains, and so came the sudden realization that the pure crystal white form he first saw within the cave was the sacred symbol of the great Himalayan god, Shiva.

The cave is like some enormous grotto broken out of gypsum rock—the material from which "plaster of Paris" is made. It is about one hundred and fifty feet wide and the vault the same height and depth; it leaks from above. At the far south-east end of the cave, the roof of which there slopes up, are large camphor-like ice formations rising from the floor, doubtless brought about by springs being frozen; the largest of these, that of a powerful spring, has formed a smooth-topped image—a lingam or phallus column which the Hindu pilgrims know to be the symbol of the god Shiva; nearby is another shape formed by a weaker but fuller spring—a breast, the symbol of his consort the goddess Parvati; yet another, like to that of Shiva but smaller, the self-formed emblem of Ganesh, the son of Shiva. It may be that the cores of these are composed of gypsum, for they have not changed in shape through the centuries. That these symbols of the deities live the pilgrims do not doubt, for they declare that the larger ones pulsate as they wax and wane with the moon and on the full-moon nights of the pilgrimage attain their largest size, slowly to reduce in the days that follow.

The story told is that in the great wide cave on that particular full-moon night in some primeval time, the god Shiva revealed to his divine consort, the goddess Parvati, the mysteries of creation. There was no serpent there to watch or hear as in the

Garden of Eden, but overcome by curiosity two *rudraganas*—faithful servants of the god—eavesdropped and listened to the sacred discourse of the heavenly pair. That they should not disclose to the world that which they had seen and heard, they were transformed into green pigeons which are said still to haunt the cave. I never saw those birds, although it seemed that I was the only one among all those gathered there who failed to do so.

My companion was to my surprise, deeply moved, more especially so as we went forward to the entrance of the cave where hundreds had gathered to take part in a service being held before the ice-Shiva. All had removed their sandals and shoes and after bowing low stood with hands together as in prayer. Whilst this was going on other votaries of the god pressed forward to lay their offerings before the image, bowing low, now supremely happy that they had suffered so many privations and sacrifices to reach it.

Within the bitter damp cold of the cave there was more than one chalk-smeared sadhu with matted hair and beard, and red markings on his forehead, who had seated himself, completely naked, cross-legged on the rough natural shelves, there to meditate or gaze in adoration at long last upon the god symbol. So still were they that I would not know if they had become frozen stiff. Like all the other pilgrims they had smeared themselves with the chalky silt; none, not even my companion, were concerned with what the others did however strange their actions, or in what manner they performed their homage and devotions; it was as though each was his own master-teacher, having his own approach to ask for favours or give thanks to the god Shiva through the material form which at long last stood before him. To some I felt, this was the actual god.

I watched a white-haired husband and wife come forward with slow steps, the man bent with age, with deep-set eyes and snow-white beard, the woman with a kindly, soft face, with pleading expressions as between them, each holding a hand, they led forward a fine-looking youth, his eyes open but sightless as he also faced the white symbol. The old people while still looking ahead, said something to him, but as he motioned his head, there was no doubt that they asked if he could see the god

symbol, nor that they had made the pilgrimage with him in the hopes that there he might regain his sight. They remained for close on half an hour, then retraced their dragging steps, both the old people overcome with emotion and with cold. Outside the woman dropped to the ground, I did not know this until I also went out, then we had her carried over to where our men stood; neither she nor her husband knew that it was brandy that she took from my flask and this probably saved her life. They were the grandparents of the boy; they said that they well knew that they were both working out some bad karma from a previous life, since each of their seven sons and one daughter had been taken from them when in their prime; then a year ago this one and only grandson had become blind and none of the Ayurvedice doctors could help him. The pilgrimage had taken them over two weeks and had been a terrible strain on the old people. They had made it eight times before, after each blow, yet still had faith.

We watched the minister arrive with his sadhu, none made way for them, since in that place all are equal. The sadhu stripped himself of his loin cloth and going over to the fountain-like sacred Amar-Ganga, which rushes through a nearby rift in the mountain, first drank of the ice cold water, and then, as had the others, bathed himself with it, so it is said, ensuring immortality. From there he went towards the entrance of the cave, gathered from its floor some of the white chalk silt, and smeared his body with it, after which he went naked towards the phallus idol, presenting, as a result of the Yogi exercises for mind and body control, a magnificent specimen of manhood in its prime, one sincere in his belief in the Hindu way of life.

At last he had reached the goal of his self-imposed task. It was strange to see his patron following him through the mass; at first it seemed as though he had come to offer his sadhu to the ice-Shiva, but as they proceeded it appeared that the sadhu had come to present him to the symbol of the god; then when they reached it, the sadhu offered all he possessed, a handful of yellow flowers; the other gave a costly gift. Before it they were both equals; they would return to the world in a few days the one to work and play, the other to meditate and pray.

Other sadhus, but not of the same "order" were there; they

had loosely covered their nakedness with birch bark before the symbol of Shiva. There was one of the patients we had seen before in the medical tent, he was almost carried as he struggled forward resting on an improvised crutch, his broken leg in plaster. After a while he was hysterically insisting that he knew that the break had mended whilst he had been in the cave and demanded that the plaster be removed. But most were so overcome or else so exhausted by their journey that they just stood barefooted and gazed ahead; they had achieved that which most good Hindus hoped for and in performing the pilgrimage over the rough stony way had suffered much physically in the belief that by so doing they would have wiped away some, if not all, of the bad they had done in this and previous lives.

Our tent had been pitched on a level patch of green just below the open space some considerable distance back on the road up. Others were already there, among them the minister's, the sadhu's and two mountain climbers' tiny tents, one with a small red cross on its side; they belonged to a couple from an American Medical Mission, and the owners had already been called to someone's aid.

The occupants of the other tent returned. The expression on the sadhu's countenance had completely changed, he was smiling and appeared like a human being as he spoke softly to his patron. The smoke from our fire, which had not been easy to light, blew into the mouth of their tent; this was my introduction to the minister and then to the sadhu, who to my utter astonishment spoke fluent English with the usual Welsh sing-song accent heard from most Anglo-Indians.

I learnt much about sadhus and their lives from him, but one story he then told us I shall always associate with that pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave.

It concerned a woman of easy virtue who some twenty years before had been shown the right way of life by a sadhu. She had left her loose profession and turned her hands to labour, at the same time making regular visits to the temple near her home. After a few months she knew that she was with child, but kept the secret to herself until she could hide it no longer. Then she went to the priest of the temple and told him what had happened. Seven days later—seven is a propitious figure in the

Hindu life—he told her that in his meditations he had received a message from the gods in the high mountains to the north that she must make the Amarnath pilgrimage so that her son might be born close to the cave on the night of the full-moon day of the month of Sawan. She had travelled there to struggle forward with the temple priest and the thousands of pilgrims to the cave mouth, where on that night, as it had been predicted would happen, the boy was born, but the woman died. The boy was brought up in the village under the watchful eye of the temple priest and the many sadhus who came to see him on hearing the strange story. He had early expressed a desire to join that order of the sadhus, the members of which on certain occasions and in certain ceremonies discard all clothes, covering themselves with ashes—those who are known as "naked sadhus". He was under instruction at a school on the banks of the sacred river Ganges when our friend was there, and he declared that the youth's powers of concentration and meditation were higher than any; all believed that he would become a great sadhu.

Then there was a silence. It was obvious that someone had to ask a question before the story could continue, and I prompted with "And where is he—what is he now?"

After a while the answer came; "The dark forces attacked him and he was not prepared: the forces of good were unable to hold him. Now he wanders round in the guise of a sadhu, but he has left us; he is one of those who under the priestly cloak misuses his mediumistic powers and has become a teller of fortunes in return for money; he robs even the poorest by making them give of what little they have; he accepts from a woman that sacred thing which belongs only to her husband."

I was glad to hear him admit that they know that among those who wear the saffron robes there are some who are humbugs and use it as a means of extracting from the poor, superstitious illiterates who live in that part of the world.

That night of the full-moon the sadhu's high, cone-shaped tent was empty. I knew that he would be within the temple cave, and since his story was so near the surface that it had been almost the first words he had spoken for seven moons, afterward immediately departing there, I have little doubt that he was praying to evoke the help of Shiva, the god of beneficence,

to help him in the effort he would make to bring back the one who had wandered. Now I cease to question whether it was for that purpose alone that he had undertaken the pilgrimage.

To those pilgrims the formations in the cave were sacred symbols of their gods; to me they were just natural phenomena; Vigne, Knowles and also Neve wrote of them as "repulsive". I wonder, are they though, those images of part of the body of man and of woman, beings "created by God in HIS own image"?

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Trek through Ladekh to Leh

THE State of Jammu and Kashmir is not entirely confined to the valley though. Through the passes to north, east and west are other provinces which all come within its boundaries, although their peoples differ in appearance, language and religion.

I suppose the most interesting of these is the province of Ladakh which some people refer to as "Little Tibet", for the people are in all respects more like those of Tibet than of the valley. The history of the country was close to that of Tibet for many hundreds of years extending back to at least the tenth century, the religious bond with Central Tibet being made the closer about the fourteenth century. One reads of their "King Deleg invoking the help of the Emperor Shah Jehan, and the fall of the western Lama Kingdom", then of the Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu sending a Dogra leader, Zorawar, to subdue Ladakh and Baltistan, of his being enticed to further expeditions in his search after the hidden gold of Lhasa, going high into the snowy mountains, there to perish with his whole army. Finally of Ladakh being made over to Gulab Singh by the treaty which also gave him Kashmir.

In these days it takes about an hour to fly from Srinagar to Leh the capital of Ladakh; it takes days—weeks sometimes—on foot by the old caravan routes through the passes which are closed for half the year, and from the numbers of books written upon the journey about the turn of the century, it would appear to have been a favourite one with those who were seeking out the unusual yet interesting places and people. Ladakh, a province of over thirty thousand square miles, is one of the highest habitations in the world; there are very few parts which are

under eight thousand feet high, while most of the people live at an elevation of between twelve thousand and fifteen thousand feet, no wonder that few venture from their country, and when they do, have soon to return or die in the denser air of the lower countries. During the days of the summer months it is exhaustingly hot, in winter, freezing cold; the summer nights can also be bitter.

Routes are divided up into so many "marches"; in the old days a march was considered the distance which could be reasonably covered in a day, providing at the end a good camping ground for the night, and usually places where fresh coolies could be employed.

The route from Srinagar to Leh which goes by way of Sonamarg, Dras and Kargil is broken up into sixteen marches, the first portion to Sonamarg being divided up into four, whereas in these days it can easily be done in a day, and providing the weather is good, this also applies to some extent to a few of the other marches laid down for other parts of the journey which is a distance over all of two hundred and forty-two miles. Since it is one of the main trade routes into Kashmir it is not astonishing that the road, when passable, is good; by that I mean good the whole of the way for horses and pack mules, and with a surprising number of quite reasonable rest houses on the way.

The first pass to be traversed after leaving Sonamarg is eleven thousand, three hundred feet high and between Beltal and Matayan. It is usually open for horses from June to December, though we soon discovered that we had been well advised to employ Dras ponymen for that part of the journey; they know the route and the short cuts as well as the diversions to save hard climbing, in addition to being able to forecast accurately the weather in the mountains.

This pass is considered to be very dangerous with sudden storms and avalanches descending upon in it the early part of the year, so that the advice always given is that there must be at least two fine crisp days after such a happening before one attempts a crossing. On the occasion when we went over, our men had refused to move for two days and then insisted on starting from Baltal, the last stage, in the early hours of the

morning so that we reached the summit with the dawn. There the wind was bitterly cold; we followed the lower track, for the road along the face of the cliff was impossible.

The Tibetan name for the pass is Zoji La; this was the first time that we discovered that most of the places from there on had two names, a Kashmiri one and a Tibetan one. Unfortunately the map seemed to have mixed them up, probably using the best known, but we did not always strike men of the country who recognised them.

Once over the pass the country changes completely; there is already a Tibetan atmosphere in the air. Going down the other side there are numerous little dak huts built by the roadside for the use of those who chance the journey too late and get caught by the weather.

We came upon what we at first imagined would be the start of a village, but found it to consist of a house or two, a telegraph post and a rest house. At many places tracks led off, some to lone, distant "farms", some to parts which were known to be good for shikar, for game is plentiful for the sportsman in parts of Ladakh. It is the home of the ibex and the markhor; both are of the wild goat family; there are wild sheep and kiang—sandy red, wild asses with dark manes and standing about twelve hands high—which are impossible to break; then there are red bear, snow leopard and in parts wolves are to be found; antelope and gazelle are common as are the reddish-brown marmot.

Here and there places had been marked on the Srinagar-printed map as the spot where a bridge would be found over the river, but there was no sign of it, probably the floods of the last season had carried it away, and we had to ford the waters; then on closer examination of the map we noticed a mark at the spot we had selected and decided that the printer had forgotten to make up his letterpress to include it in the key, or perhaps we were credited with enough common sense to know.

The first night we reached a rest house, and were there only just in time, for a quarter of an hour later a large party of men from Leh arrived; a few remained to sleep under the verandahs outside—the stench of bodies was overpowering. I have been assured that the men of Ladakh are bathed three times only in their lives, when they are born, when they marry and when they

die, and I have no reason to disbelieve this. One of the difficulties is that there is practically no rainfall in this land either in summer or winter. Water comes from the snows, these feed the rivers, but much of the snow simply evaporates at this height; the mountains are arid; among the rocks bushes occasionally grow which carry few leaves on their green twigs, but sufficient to feed the wild goats. The only sign of vegetation is either along the river banks or in the nullahs and protected valleys through which the snow waters flow for a while and which do not take the glare of the sun which pours with great power through the clear air. From above it appears as if a giant flame-thrower has scorched the earth, which in different parts takes on all the colours of a burned brick, and in its destruction has missed those valleys tucked away. All around us were giant chocolate-coloured rock cliffs which hold the snow deep during the winter months, and permit the sun to shine for but a few hours on the small village.

Dras—known by the Tibetans as Hembas—seems to be not one but a number of villages spread over a quite fertile undulating valley which is enclosed within a ring of hills but at a height of ten thousand feet and so placed that the bitter winter winds sweep down on it. When we were there the clumps of willows were green with young leaves and they told us that by by the time we returned the skylarks would have come from Kashmir.

Oddly enough there are a few European-style houses standing in their own gardens, and a rest house of similar design, built with a high pitched roof and tall chimneys, but looking strange, for it was without the verandahs which one has become so used to in India and Kashmir. The sand and dust gets in through all the cracks, in winter it is carried there by the icy blast, yet it must be a comfortable haven to those who are stranded there.

The valley narrows as one goes on past small fields which would appear to have been scratched out from the rock-covered surface of the ground; I can well remember being shown by a proud "farmer"—the father of one of the horsemen who came the whole way with us—a large patch scattered with stones as big as my fist, in which surely not more than a thousand green spears of barley had just come through. Anywhere else the sowing

would have been considered a complete failure, but he assured me that all were agreed that he was in for a record crop.

Generally the way is bare and barren, yet with stores in the pony packs and the knowledge that one does not have to live there, it is grand, at times beautiful, in a rugged way; the road leads along the face of a precipice at one time, then changes to sandy banks, next across the only suspension bridge I felt safe in passing over, then ascending—we had until that time come slowly down—and on turning a spur of the mountain, we entered Ladakh, Kargil being the first habitation within its borders.

Kargil is quite an extensive place, with villages scattered on either side of the Suru river, and many miles of ground which in the spring is under water from the melting snows, bringing down earth from the mountains, this being made into fields during the summer and autumn.

The walls of the low-built houses are made of mud and stones mixed together, the finish is very crude; they look more like cow-sheds than houses. It seemed to be a land of women; they were everywhere, round the houses, in the fields, coming down the hillsides with great bundles of sticks on their heads. It seems that the men leave their womenfolk there whilst they go either up to Leh or down to Srinagar with goods, or else hire themselves out as labourers. The Kargil man is also considered quite a good shikari and is engaged as such by shooting parties.

Kargil is the capital of Purik, a province in which most of the inhabitants are Ladakhis who have become Muslims. Beyond this town the people are Buddhists; their dress, customs and ways are so different from those seen before that there awakens a new interest in the journey.

After first passing over the plateau, we found ourselves entering a long ravine which gradually contracts until one wonders if there is any exit from it, the scenery is even more grand with fantastically shaped crags cut out of the brilliant and gloriously coloured sandstone. There are a few tiny hamlets which cluster round the rare patches of greenery which were like giant raindrops that had fallen on an unsympathetic, barren land of hard rocks and sleeping sands moved there by the winds at their will.

Then, when a mile or two from Maulbeck, we struck the first of the hundreds of monasteries, chortens and prayer walls. Chortens are white-washed pagoda erections, something like giant chess-men varying in height from about a yard to forty or even fifty feet. They are the graves of lamas, buried within and not under them, their ashes being mixed with clay, baked into large biscuits and stamped with the image of Buddha. Prayer walls are seven feet high—probably so that none can look down upon them—and about the same width, the tops are apexed and they extend sometimes for hundreds of yards. The stones with which they have been made have been elaborately carved and inscribed with the Tibetan prayer "Om mani padme hom", which in its translation, "God the flower of the lotus", conveys little to the traveller, or for that matter even to the average monk, although it is repeated by him countless times every day, and not only by him, but also by all men and women of the land as they go about their work and as they journey along the road. They are the first six syllables the child is taught to utter, they are the last words gasped by the dying, and during a life-time followers of the Lama Church will have uttered them millions of times and sent them to heaven on prayer wheels billions of times; they are to be found written everywhere. Surely this phrase (or prayer), one which I saw one writer of well back in the past century liken to "Our father which art in Heaven", must be the one written and spoken more than any on this earth, for its origin goes right back and is lost in the dim past. These great walls are built by lamas or monks who spend their lives moving from one place to another doing only that work, thus gaining merit for themselves; each stone so placed is considered a good deed well done. All who pass these walls must go on the left-hand side for by so doing they also gain merit.

Perched high on a spire-like rock which rises above the village of Maulbeck which clusters around its feet, is a white Lamasery or Buddhist monastery, close to which is an enormous figure of Buddha carved in the rock face. Partly hiding this image when one is standing on the roadway, is a rather grand building which is well kept: it seemed odd to me that even the most ignorant of men could have built a house in such a

position. Then I heard that many years ago when the country was invaded by the Muslims, the whole of this carved cliff face was encased by the Tibetans behind buildings which were hastily made to hide the sacred Buddha, since the Mohammedans looked upon such carvings as idols and would have defaced it. Now the Buddha stands in a perfect state of preservation wearing bracelets, a double necklace, earrings and a headpiece, and with four arms, two of which are held up, the others hanging by his side have a serpent entwined around them. It is really a fine piece of work with details such as even the stomach muscles carved.

There was then no doubt as to our having entered the land in which all were his followers; every village has its monastery; bits of rags fluttered from poles on the roofs of houses—prayer flags; chortens and manis are to be found everywhere, just as are the prayer wheels, some set upright so that those who pass can revolve them by hand, others placed near to a stream for the water to turn them, and on each revolution a prayer is automatically sent to heaven. The people carry these prayer wheels on a stick in their hands; usually they are made of copper, the wealthier among them have them studded with coral, turquoise and decorated, but they all contain prayers which have been written down from one of the holy books. If the prayer is written one hundred times, then with one turn of the wheel a hundred prayers are sent up to heaven.

The day following we had another pass to cross over. This, the Namikha La, is close on thirteen thousand feet high, but was far easier going than the first. What amazed us was that the white which we had imagined to be snow on its summit, we found to be salt. Salt is one of Ladakh's principal exports; this is transported in small sacks strapped like saddle-bags on the backs of goats, herds of them being used for this purpose and occasionally met with on the road.

Going down to the string of villages we saw the old castle on the top of the hill; now a ruin, it was once the scene of bitter fighting in the sixteen hundreds. The village is at the foot of the hill, but the extraordinary thing is that on the steep hill sides, which would seem impossible to climb, there are many dwellings which appear to be stuck on; the rooms run into the hill

itself; the castle fort surmounting them must have been almost impossible to get at other than by alpine ropes.

The day following, we had our highest pass to cross and the easiest of them all. This was Fotu La at a height of thirteen thousand, four hundred feet. I had gone on, for I had seen ibex ahead—these are goat-like animals with coats varying in colour from cream to chocolate. On the summit I waited for the rest of the party while I admired the magnificent view, and watched them climbing up, so very slowly. Not until then did I appreciate the height we had reached and how it affected one by slackening movements.

From there it was a downhill road two thousand feet to Lamayaru along a watercourse tight in between gloriously coloured cliffs of most unusual shape; later we came on a valley with a stony path lined by prayer walls and dozens of chortens, the village being at the far end with a most interesting monastery built on the low hills above it.

The road on is along the bed of a narrow ravine, so narrow, with overhanging cliffs in places and the swift stream close on the other side, that one is forced to cross and recross almost the whole way. At the far end there is a bridge guarded by an old Dorga fort. Lamayaru has towering above it the ancient castle of Bragnag, built by King Naglug and dating back to A.D. 1150.

The great Buddhist monastery here is an astonishing place. It seems to consist of an enormous conglomeration of buildings, some of which might be carved out of the hill. There are narrow passages, steep staircases and unprotected ramparts; in parts there are tiny cells, in others large chapels with high-up windows and low benches; little recesses are cut in the walls, presumably for books. In one of these chapels there is a great image of Chubrezig which must be ten or twelve feet high; its background is a large circular plaque almost as high. The image has eleven heads, one on each side of that which is facing, and the others piled on top of them: it has a thousand hands spread out tier upon tier around the plaque, one of the larger pairs being held in prayer, another pair holding a rosary in one hand and a jewel in the other.

And from the roof of practically every house which sits at the foot of the hill, rag prayer flags fly, sending prayers to heaven,

the lamas and those going to the chapels sending still more as they climb the steps and give a twist to the dozens of prayer wheels on either side.

Then for some miles the road is trying, at times through a narrowing gorge, up and down the rock sides. Few others than those who knew the road well would have dared to have ridden, for there is nothing to save one from slipping over the side, and in places the track had almost broken away to leave nothing. I think the most terrifying experience is when a small portion of the track gives way under one's feet: yet the horses know the road; at times, as you walk ahead, there is a pull at the rein, and turning you see your horse testing with his forefoot the ground immediately ahead of him.

Then the road changes to open country. It is hard going, being shadeless, so that during the middle of the day the journey was difficult with the heat seeming to come up from the ground, forcing us to halt during these hours at a wayside rest house, to continue later, passing but one patch of vegetation in about fifteen miles of monotonous track to Saspul where there is a most fascinating Alchi monastery containing many traces of Kashmir workmanship. There is also the cave monastery of Nyiziapur, now a ruin.

The next day we covered the eleven mile march from Saspul to Nimu, starting rather late since we had that morning visited the monastery. At the beginning the journey was interesting, the more so after the bare country we had gone over for the past few days. We left the river Indus and crossed a plateau, then down into the most picturesque village of Bazgu. The high cliffs are peppered with old ruins, the village itself built on a steep hill, the rocks fantastic in their shape and brilliant in colour, with the whole dominated by a large Lamasery and a ruined castle which history says "were long besieged by Mongols in the time of Gyalpo Delegs who ruled between 1640 and 1680 A.D." The rest of the day was spent over arid sandy wastes, a distance of some four miles to reach the comfort of a rest house with a garden.

The last march of all is nearly eighteen miles, first ascending the plateau, then as the valley opens out, a gradual descent through a stony desert, at odd places relieved by small patches of

green cultivation. Then the welcome halting place—a rest house for lunch, a famous monastery some hundred years old, a ruined castle as usual, and a further three miles on to a most picturesque monastery which is five hundred years old, and the entrance to the Leh valley. Here we left the river Indus, to make the gradual ascent over the now better road to Leh, which we could see some four miles in the distance, and which I must admit did not thrill me as we made towards it; we had passed on the way so many beautiful places that I expected to discover in Leh the jewel of them all. As we neared it we could make out on the hill the great, one hundred roomed palace of the ancient kings of Ladakh, and above that the enormous—in their spread—buildings of the monastery, and were duly impressed, though not overawed, for everything seems to be of the same earth stone colour, as though the buildings, which could be made in miniature with a child's box of bricks, have risen from the rocks like the commencement of an eruption which changed its mind, just as we had seen so many of them on our way, now decaying back to from whence they came.

But Leh is an important place, not only is it the capital of Ladakh, but it is also—and to the people of the country this is far more important—the religious capital of Western Tibet, besides being a great centre for caravans passing to and from Central Asia, the entrepôt of trade between India on the south, and Yarkand, Khotan and Tibet on the north and east. Here in the great bazaar which is held in the September month of each year. Traders from Turkistan, Siberia, Tibet and other parts of Central Asia come to buy, sell and barter their merchandise with those who have come from Kashmir and India, so that we found people of all races and religions there with Buddhism predominating, and a sprinkling of Mohammedans; a Moravian Mission is there also, and among the people are to be found numbers of Mohammedan half-castes known as Arghons; they are the offsprings of visiting traders and the women of the land "with whom they have made a temporary marriage".

The Ladakhis are Mongolian in features. Their ugly faces are soon forgotten though, since they possess a pronounced sense of humour and are always laughing, although their dirty stubby teeth then seen are not an enhancement to their beauty. Very

few are over five feet in height, and they appear to be compact, but this is not too easy to decide since the men wear very thick long-sleeved cloaks or chogas—much like dressing gowns tied round the waist with a leather girdle—loose trousers tucked in felt gaiters and boots; usually they wear woollen caps with ear flaps and their oiled, black pig-tail of hair hangs behind. The women wear long gowns like coat-frocks with full skirts, sheep-skin chogas and cloth caps which have ear flaps standing out. The best clothes kept for gala holidays have the head dress made of velvet, trimmed with fur edging and ornamented with large corals, turquoise and silver; their frocks are bright with trimmings of brilliant braids and scarves which tie in front—all the cloth is home spun; their "furs" consist of a short, gaily coloured cape trimmed on its edge with long, silken goat hair.

The younger women are quite good-looking, the skin is tight on their faces, and they have a fresh bloom upon their high cheek bones. None know their age, so that it is difficult to judge if they age rapidly or normally, though I have seen many mothers who looked old enough to be grandmothers and long past childbearing, with children tied to their backs. When once the skin slackens it rapidly becomes wrinkled and dark. It seems that they use as a cosmetic the bright yellow juice of a berry, which also acts as an astringent. I do not believe they ever wash it off; when it wears a bit they apply another coat.

The population consists of two communities, the Ladakhis proper and the Champas or nomads; there is no intermarriage between them. The Champas are the shepherds; they take their flocks of sheep and herds of goats to the upland valleys where they live in tents, very rarely does one become a monk; it is they with their wool who supply the principal commercial export product of the country. The Ladakhis are mostly engaged in agricultural pursuits, each family having its tiny portion of land. These people are poor by modern standards, living a simple life in a country which has not yet heard of the modern inventions and progress of the outside world. They plough the land with an animal called a zho, an ever-grunting beast which is a cross between a yak and a cow, the land being watered either by the river or by canal water. They grow barley, wheat, buckwheat, beans, peas and rape seed, and at the greater heights

a kind of barley known as grim; from this, *chang*, the drink of the people is made; it has a sour odour. The fruit trees bear apricots, apples and mulberries.

The zho is the animal most used for riding, being quieter than the yak, though they are not nearly as strong as the yak which is a big brute, with great head, short horns, and covered with dark brown hair. It is a strange creature, for just as a horse will stretch down its neck and bite at some grass as it goes along, so the yak when being driven through the snow, will take a mouthful and make a loud grunting noise, a characteristic which it does not pass on to its half-breed son; for the zho does not grunt, it grinds its teeth in a strange manner, a sound which one either comes to put up with and does not notice, or is nearly driven mad by.

Practically all the animals in Ladakh grow an undercoat of fine down in the winter time, even the small horses. It is that from the Ladakhi goat which is exported to Kashmir for the making of the famous pashmina shawls, and through Ladakh pass caravans carrying it there from Kashgar. In calling it "pashmina", they have without doubt corrupted and used the Russian word "pushmina". Here in Leh, were to be bought soft blankets of brown and black wool, which are probably made from the undercoat of the zho, the yak, and maybe the little mountain pony.

The people's food is simple. Meat is too expensive for the poor to eat except on festive occasions. Mostly they eat thick barley cakes or barley meal in a broth of turnips heavily salted. Like the Kashmiri they have their own way of making tea; strong tea is mixed with soda, and then salted and churned with butter until the whole becomes creamlike in its thickness.

Religion is the greatest power in the lives of the people. They are Buddhists, practising a form known in Tibet and referred to as Lamaism; a religion which dominates their lives, promising every true follower the bliss of Nirvana; faith which, the Abbot of one of the monasteries told me, "teaches compassion, courtesy, kindliness, truthfulness, loyalty, politeness in word, cheerfulness and good humour". And from what I saw of them I should imagine that many of these qualities are to be found in the majority of the people in a land where murders

are few. It was the Emperor Asoka, the great missionary-monarch, who between the years 272 and 231 B.C. first sent Buddhist missionaries to Ladakh on goodwill missions, and on their arrival there they built monasteries.

The people of this land claim that ninety per cent of the population are literate although they are simple and unsophisticated; they are carefree, gay and sociable, the smallest excuse providing for a feast with laughter, dancing and singing, with an opportunity for drinking large quantities of *chang*, which results in general drunkenness. Births, marriages and even deaths are ordinary occasions for feasting and drinking, with singing and dancing girls always a part of the entertainment. Arthur Neve said of them, "They are a contented cheerful race, neither quarrelsome nor revengeful, or rarely so under the influence of *chang*, a sort of barley beer. They are fairly honest and simple-minded, but conspicuously lacking in chastity and cleanliness. From simple and natural marriage customs they are debarred by the restricted nature of the country, and by the intense cold in winter, from ablutions, which they also dispense with in summer by choice."

On entering the town one passes through a gateway into the main street, one which is shaded by great poplars on both sides, behind which are the flat-roofed houses with odd rooms piled high on top of each other. In this wide street, as is common in Ladakh, polo used to be played; now there is a special ground for the game by the castle wall. Polo is the national game and is played on small shaggy Ladakh ponies which are fast and on which the rider looks oversized. When a game is in progress in the other towns, the street is cleared, the shops shut, and the onlookers sit on the walls, in windows or on the roof tops. At "important" matches a band blasts furiously, working both players and watchers up to a terrific tension.

The surprising thing is that although the people never wash and are filthy in their persons, their homes are reasonably clean and tidy, the lanes and streets are swept, and there is no litter or filth lying about. The houses are substantial, with wooden shutters to the windows, for throughout the whole land, although it may be unbearably hot during the day, the nights can be bitter: some declare that a bucket of water stood out on some

summer nights will have a layer of ice on its surface the next morning. Yet the winter's day can be considerably warmer outside than in. At such times of the year there is often a difference of as much as fifty degrees between the sunny courtyard of a Lamasery and the inside of one of its thick-walled cells. Dr. Arthur Neve speaking of this difference declared it to be as much as ninety degrees at times: having always found his statements to be accurate, I have no reason to question them, for I have little doubt that he went round with a thermometer, which I did not carry.

With practically no rainfall there is very little wood to be had even for cooking, and none for firing, so that the nights are dark except for the moon. One can imagine the chances of a crate of window glass arriving intact under such transport conditions as I have described.

The day following my arrival in Leh I was most fortunate in meeting in the main bazaar a Buddhist priest I had before known in Ceylon, he being one of the brothers belonging to the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. He was a learned old man who, I then remembered, had once told me that his grandfather had come from "Little Tibet". Now old, he had had the good fortune to be brought to Leh by an equally aged Buddhist merchant of Kandy who, feeling that his end was near, wished, for some inexplicable reason to go to Leh, there to die. The priest who was his great friend, had come with him; the old man had died during the winter months; now the priest was to return alone.

He had been easy to pick out from the others, for as with the Buddhists of Ceylon, he had no head dress and wore saffron-coloured robes. The lamas or monks of Ladakh wear a cloak and shawl of dirty wine colour; they belong to what is known as the red sect; their shaven heads are covered with red, longish shaped hats with ear flaps. Some of them are married. Occasionally one sees a member of the yellow sect; they mostly come from Tibet, are of a much stricter order than the red and more ascetic and learned. They do not marry.

From him, together with one of the head monks of the great monastery, I learnt of the customs of the land, why it is that every one in five or six men one sees about is a monk, and the

reason for the existence of so many monasteries always inhabited and one to each town or village of reasonable size.

Ladakh is a land of extreme barrenness. If the population were permitted to increase the people would starve, for not only are they unable to grow sufficient to support more mouths than are already there, but with communications so bad, little can be imported. In order to retain the population at its present level, since they are unable to live for long in other climates after all their lives breathing the rarer air of the mountains, as in Tibet, polyandry has become the custom of the land, and has been so from time immemorial, having proved a powerful check on the population, the greater percentage of which are women.

The system of polyandry is confined to brothers, each family having but one wife, and although the usual number of husbands is three, four or even five are not unknown. Occasionally one hears of a "brother" being adopted at the demand of the wife, and rather than lose their wife, the husbands have to agree to her lover becoming one of them. On no account can a family have more than one wife, so that the unfortunate younger brothers in a large one have to suffer. The eldest son inherits the family estate as soon as he marries; it is his duty then to provide for his parents, grandparents and unmarried sisters, in addition to which he has to support those brothers who share his wife. This system of inheritance keeps the property intact, for there is never more than one heir and the patrimony is never divided.

If there is no son, then the property of the family is inherited by the daughter who is free to marry any man she wishes, even to have an experimental marriage with a younger son—this is done by a State-recognised religious ceremony. And she can divorce him after giving him a small present, say a sheep, if after a few days' trial he does not come up to her expectations. Besides all this she may choose several husbands if she so desires, all becoming the "brothers" of her first husband, who dare not protest for fear of being sacked. One can imagine the power an heiress has in her hands and how carefully the husband has to conduct himself that he is not dismissed. The husband of an heiress is called a "magpa". He, poor fellow, is unable to leave his heiress wife unless he can prove the grossest

misconduct, no easy task in a country where the moral code is not too high and where husbands are prepared to share their wife.

The children of a family have one "big father" and several "little fathers". When the husband who actually married the woman dies, she need not remain with the brothers or junior husbands. If she wishes to leave them, she just ties a thread to the finger of her dead husband, breaks it, and is at once free of them all. It is a land where women enjoy unfettered power and liberty.

The simpleness of these people was early on demonstrated to me. We had considered ourselves fortunate in securing the services of a shikari from Leh who had taken a party through from that city the previous season to Baltistan to shoot markhor, afterwards going down with them to Srinagar. He had been away from his home for nearly a year, but showed no great delight on returning there, even though he met his brother who had also just returned from Tibet, he being a guide who each season took parties through from Leh to Lhasa, a three months' journey. Both men must have been in their late thirties, their wife was a comely soul of about the same age; she carried a baby which was not yet able to walk, and when next day I visited the house, which both brothers insisted that I must see, it was obvious, even although she was wearing the full dress of her countrywomen, that there was another child on the way.

After a while a boy, who might have been fifteen years old, came in and, since he acted as though he was a member of the household, I naturally took him to be a son, but not a bit of it, he was the third husband. Then I started working things out; both the elder brothers had been away from their home for so long that the child that was coming could only be that of the younger boy brother, and harking back again, I remembered that they had told me that the season before both had been away, so that the baby the wife carried in her arms must also have been his. It seemed that she had been married to the brothers for over twelve years and had had no children—probably both men were diseased—now when the boy brother took his place in the line, the family had started to increase. But the suggestion that they would at least know who was the father, was immediately

blanketed, with "You do not understand. All three brothers planted the seed, the younger one only kept it watered!" And so no boy will really believe that he knows his own father, unless of course the wife has but one husband. If he considers the question at all, it seems that he thinks of his mother's first husband as his father; anyway it is his name that he always gives on permits and application forms.

As one would expect of an heiress and her husbands, it is she who decides which of her husbands shall accommodate her, when and for how long. But this is not always the case, for when I was there the men were laughing over a very wealthy middle-aged heiress whose youngest husband, a particularly handsome magpa, having proved to her his worth as a lover, had to the astonishment of everyone become so powerful that it was he, and not she, who laid down the rules for the house, it was he who granted to his "brothers" their wife's favours, it was he who reserved the right to butt in whenever he wished. And all this came about through the old story of feminine jealousy, for the wife had caught a pretty young heiress eyeing her youthful new husband on more than one occasion, and this just after she had herself realized his qualities.

In the case of a family in which the wife is not an heiress, it is the elder brother who arranges these matters. Even then, with an extremely pretty woman there are times when the adopted brother, with whom she is really in love, manages to gain power by threatening divorce. Then, if the head of the family is weak, it is this "brother" who takes over the marital arrangements, but not the family estates or responsibilities.

It seemed from the candid remarks of my shikari guide, that with himself and his next brother having been away from their wife for so long, the boy brother would be crowded out and like so many husbands of his age, have to snatch the wife's favours when she could spare the time during the day.

The houses of the middle and higher class have one room set aside for the wife, but in the houses of the poorer people all sleep in one room. The odd thing is that although there must be arguments over the wife, seldom, if ever, does a violent quarrel take place. Probably this is because there are other outlets for passions in Ladakh.

I can well imagine the shock any high-minded Englishman or woman must suffer after they have been reminded, as I was by the Head Lama, that it is known that when Julius Caesar first went to England, he discovered that polyandry was a common practice in the country.

If there are more than three brothers, unless the wife is prepared to cope with extra husbands, then those remaining have the choice of either becoming a lama and entering the monastery or becoming a coolie; unless of course one is born fortunate enough to catch the eye of an heiress.

These lamas who are both male and female, usually remain single, though there is no bar against their marriage. The women lamas or nuns, known as chamos, live in different buildings, but they do not live entirely separate from each other, the nuns undertaking many of the household duties in the monasteries, such as baking bread, cooking and so on.

It is not unknown for a family to dedicate their first born, or even the favourite son to this religious life. In that event he is sent to a monastery school—which is residential—from the age of eight years, passing through all the stages of pupil, probationer and finally fully ordained monk. As such he has to observe some two hundred and fifty-three vows, and monastic life—at least of the yellow order—imposes a hard discipline upon the monks, including celibacy and abstinence. His diet consists of barley, wheat or buckwheat and occasionally rice. The only meat allowed to be eaten is either sheep, goat or yak, and the chief beverages are soup, milk and tea.

In every village we had passed through we had seen belonging to practically every house a little boy wearing a lama's hat or a little girl wearing the cap of a chamo. They had been dedicated as the one of the family to enter the monastery or nunnery school as soon as they were old enough.

The monks, in addition to being divided into sects, are separated into two classes; one, those who would in any event have entered the monastery, devote their time to meditation, prayers and the spiritual side "their life being on a higher spiritual plane", and two, those who beg for alms, cultivate the land, look after the rents and so on. The doctors among them—those I met anyway,—had started in the first class and then

moved down to the more physical plane and entered the life of the other.

Their chief spiritual head is the Dalai Lama of Tibet, and he is to them "the Vice-Regent of Buddha on earth". They, and all Buddhists believe in reincarnation—some souls remain in the spirit world for many, perhaps thousands of years resting, while those of the more important leaders such as the Dalai Lama and head lamas of some of the great monasteries leave the body when it dies and enter into that of a child almost immediately.

Writing in 1932 of the life of the monks themselves, Norris who appears to have studied the subject, says that they "are generally lax in observing the precepts of their religion and depraved in many of their habits, so that one cannot help comparing their practises with the worst abuses prevalent among monasteries in Europe during the middle ages. In Ladakh Buddhism has sunk into a system of degraded idolatry, guided by meaningless conventions and fantastic superstitions".

Of the nuns one reads in *Kashmir*, "as in the case of the lamas, there are both the yellow and the red sects. . . . Nuns of the yellow sect enjoy a higher reputation than their red counterparts".

Either polygamy or polyandry will throw out the balance of the remaining unabsorbed sex, but in Ladakh there is this added custom whereby no family is permitted to have more than one wife. Human nature being what it is, one would expect difficulties to arise in this connection, but it would appear, from what I both heard and saw, that few of the sexual acts condemned as perversions by Moses in the Holy Bible and by Mohammed in the Holy Koran are considered as sins, or even mentioned in the "book" of these lamas.

The monasteries, which own much land and property, are known as Gimpa by the Ladakhis. Both impressive and picturesque, they are practically always perched on what at first appears to be an inaccessible cliff, the walls of stone masonry usually of the same colour as the site which overlooks the whole of the village.

I was taken over more than one of these by my Ceylon friend, spending two nights there, for the lamas are a most hospitable bunch of fellows. I must admit that as I got to know the few

who could make themselves understood to me and I to them, I began to realize that, as may be expected from a man when he is faced with the choice of hard work for life and poverty in his old age, or the possibility of a life not so hard and care in his old age, many were not really as devout, sincere and moral in their lives and thoughts as they should be and could be classified as professional lamas; it may be that I expected too much from them.

At the entrance to the monastery there were as always a number of prayer cylinders; upon entering we rotated these, thus sending our prayers to heaven as we passed. At the entrance were also quite a few savage mastiffs which are there to guard the gates—from whom I did not discover—but they looked most vicious brutes even when the lama on duty held them back from us. In the courtyard was a large square building containing the images; no woman may enter here. The dimly lit chapel, odorous with incense, was interesting with elaborately and beautifully carved images of Buddha in all kinds of stone, some being gilded. Spread out before the most important of them all was the most amazing collection of gifts, a French gilded clock, a Venetian glass vase with lustres hanging, a basket shape made up of coloured sea shells and filled with faded feather flowers, an ivory pagoda shape, and most surprising of all, a china funeral wreath under its glass canopy. The walls had the most lovely Chinese silk and Tibetan gold-embroidered velvet hangings. Beneath these were some bowls of "incarnation water". To one side was a large stool, rather like a low table with a small rail around it; this had two steps leading up to it and was cloth covered, obviously the pulpit from whieh thc Head Lama preached as he sat. To one side and at the feet of a great Buddha, were dull gilded metal "champagne cups".

The most beautiful murals had been painted on the walls; the Chinese school revealed itself in many of them. Each of the figures was as though floating in a cloud in the heavens; one, a fair Tibetan figure playing a stringed instrument, was surrounded by white clouds, the next, a bolt-eyed, dark skinned warrior with a sword in his hand floated in dark clouds. The Buddhist Ceylon priest said that they depicted Good and Evil: the Head Lama went into the story of a war fought between

lamas and invaders. I am inclined to believe my Ceylon friend.

It was he who reminded the Head Lama to repeat to me that which he had told many visiting Europeans for scores of years past. It is the belief of the lamas, and accepted by a certain sect of the Christians, that Jesus the Christ during "the hidden years of his life" spent about seven of them in meditation and study within the walls of the monastery.

I then remembered that on an occasion whilst sitting alone on Char Chinar, an Indian youth had come softly ashore from a shikara, and after we had talked for a while, I commented upon the quiet serenity which surrounded the island, at which he confidently assured me that this was because the Master Jesus had many times, when he was in Kashmir, preached from the silver isle to the many who had gathered round it in shikaras to listen to him.

There is a sect in Kashmir known as the Quadiani who believe that Christ lived there for some time; they showed me a grave at Khanayar in Srinagar where they insist that he was buried, saying that he was there known as Hazrat Yuz Asaf, but on further enquiring and searching records, I found that Yuz Asaf, the supposed descendant of Moses was ambassador from the King of Egypt to the court of Zain-ul-Ab-ul-din. Strangely enough though, according to Kalhana in his *Rajatarangini*, during the reign of Jayendra who ruled between about 61 B.C. and A.D. 24, there was a minister by name Samdhimati-Aryara-aja, described as "the greatest of sages", who lived a life of poverty, suffered imprisonment for many years, and then "met his death at the stake", afterwards "coming to life again and in answer to the prayers of the people, ruled over Kashmir for forty years". He seems to have just faded out of the picture, since there is no mention of his final going and there is no suggestion that he might have been a mythical and not an historical individual.

Some of the old books in the monastery library were in rolls and written by hand, others, more recent, had been printed on paper which is made there and called *par-shog*; the leaves, which are about four inches wide, are not uniform in length, some are a foot, others eight or ten inches long, they are folded and

numbered, being held between two flat slats of wood. None I saw told of the history of the land—on this I could only accept the word of the Head Lama—they consisted of prayers and mystical formulae. To watch them being printed was interesting, letters and words being cut on stereotyped wooden blocks which were pressed on the ink pad and then on the page of the book, just as cloth is hand-printed with floral decorations. It is necessary for the printer to be a man of education, one who knows what he is printing and has plenty of time and patience. No wonder that new "books" are rarely published.

In the red monastery which is on the top of the hill behind the palace, there is a great image of Matreiya which is twenty-five feet high. It was erected by King Ide, who must have miscalculated its height when building the chapel in which it was housed, for the head projects above the ceiling and another portion had to be built to take this.

With every possible occasion being made an excuse for festivities, music is a necessary contribution, and this is provided by Mon musicians. The Mons were the first to enter Ladakh in about 200 B.C. The band consists of a round-topped drum, cymbals, clarinets and trumpets which are anything up to twelve feet long. The dancing seems to consist of continuous twirls with the dancers going round in circles. The first time that I witnessed this was on the occasion of a wedding. The groom was then sitting on a swastika drawn for luck on the ground and awaiting his bride. The bridal party, dressed in gay gowns and high gilded hats, arrived, dancing as they came. After the ceremony all the relatives danced, each separately, but the whole dance consisting of whirling round and round, with the dancers formed in a circle which opened and closed. The women were each holding out one hand which they gracefully opened and closed—the opening of a blossom; the men also revolving, but at a slower pace, were performing the oddest movements with their necks, which could only be described as like a chicken pecking.

By hand and head movements the dancer tells a story, but the same movements may be used to convey a different meaning in other parts of the country or on various occasions. They are a gesture language of hand, head and feet as I had known and

seen in India, and all were spontaneous, it being only by chance that each dancer followed the other at that time, as I saw later on when the plentiful flow of *chang* was having its effect upon them.

We had made the journey over the passes earlier than was considered wise in the season simply to enable one of our party to film the Spring Festival which takes place in June in the Hermis Monastery, a great building which houses several hundreds of monks and is said to be fabulously wealthy, having escaped the invasion of the Dogras, and is believed to have hidden within its walls all the gold and valuables of other monasteries taken there before they were sacked. From Leh it is twenty-four miles—two marches.

The festival is famous and renowned throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world, and people come from hundreds of miles to witness it. The dance-play there performed by the lamas is so ancient that its origin is lost in the past. It is a mixture of a miracle play, pantomime and a fête parade, the whole scene brilliant and vivid with colour and movement, and blasting with sound, for the lama orchestra is composed of many drums, cymbals, clarinets, giant trumpets and triangles, which to my ear was pandemonium and seemed to make no attempt at keeping together, each of its members appearing bent on outshining the others.

The music is as fantastic as is everything in that land; it breathes mystery. Nowhere else in the East, except in Tibet of course, is it to be heard. Yet I am assured that there is more science in it than the European ear is attuned to, though search as I did with the utmost desire to understand it, I was unable to discover its quality. There are strange discords, sudden changes, abrupt ceasings—at this latter the voices of the lamas which must have been there all the time in the background would continue in a lower key with melancholy chanting. My Ceylon friend assured me that the chants were older than those of any other religion, and that the quarter notes, with their very delicate distinctions which my ear could not catch, required hours of practice by the lamas of the choir. With the droning of the voices, the flatness and sameness of the music and the smell of incense—which certainly did to an extent smother the

unpleasant odour of those sitting around me—it was difficult at times to keep my eyes open.

The costumes are as old as the play and made of beautiful brocades embroidered in gold and silver; some of the dancers wear great black hats, others giant masks of animals or the faces of the evil spirits of legendary characters, the same as are depicted on the walls of the monasteries and known to all the people from their earliest childhood. The play demonstrates how Good triumphs over Evil, but only after a two-day struggle, during which the evil hideous spirits whirl and twist, wildly charging and leaping in their frightening effort most wickedly to destroy Good. Then at long last comes the triumph of Good—Buddhism of course—over Evil, and the bad ones' terrified flight under the wrath of the flashing swords of Good.

During the two days both dancers and orchestra reach a terrific speed and state of excitement, carrying with them those who are watching, the latter it is hoped by the lamas, being duly impressed by the power of the Lord Buddha and his always ultimate magnificent victory over all that is evil, however powerful the challenge may first appear, and however successful in its opening phase.

Back in Leh, at night we watched the festival go on for days, for happiness was in the air; the winter with its cold and bitterness had gone, the land would again yield its fruits, the caravans would come from the "distant lands" of which the people of Ladakh had no knowledge other than that gleaned from those who came from those parts; and Good had once again, this time after a most terrific and thrilling struggle, conquered Evil.

Singing and dancing—and drinking—continued. The young men came out with hobby-horses and acted a polo game for our benefit, the girls were made to form a circle and sing to us, the bands blasted our ears with their "music", and the people were delighted that they had been able to make us as happy as they were themselves.

When all had gone and the lights had faded away, the thin crescent of the moon and the twinkling stars seemed to become a brighter silver against the indigo-velvet sky which was only separated from us by the snow-capped mountains of purple brown; mountains which are said to contain untold wealth if

only those who dwell there would have them surveyed to disclose the gold and gems held tight within their stony grasp.

And when they do at last arouse themselves and waken from the sleep in which they are now content, then wealth will pour into that hard barren land of near poverty; but I wonder, could they be happier then?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Baltistan and Gilgit

LADAKH however is but one of the provinces which fringe the north, south, east and west of the Kashmir valley like heavy crochet edging an oval table cloth.

On the northern border lies Baltistan, with Ladakh to its east and Turkistan to the north. The country extends for something like a hundred and fifty miles along either side of the river Indus, the same distance that Ladakh clings to its precious waters.

Set among the mountains—to the north shut off from all communications by the mighty Mustagh Range and to the south by the Himalayas—through which there are a few passes, it is almost as barren as Ladakh, with wild, cold, lofty heights and deep valleys mostly bare, all of which drain into the Indus.

Among those mountains is to be seen K. 2, now usually known as Mount Godwin Austin, being so named after the officer of the Survey Department who discovered it; its height —28,250 feet—is second only to Everest. Other high peaks are Gasharbrum, some 26,470 feet and Masharbrum, 25,600 feet. Some of the largest glaciers known to exist in the world are to be found here; Baltor is claimed as the largest outside the Arctic. Strange wonders these glaciers are; you might have been pushing up a valley, over their snow-crusted surface for hours before discovering that beneath the snow there is the ice surface of a glacier: the great rock walls on either side are smooth, rubbed so by the glacier when its height was greater, and on returning to that part where ice melts to water one finds heaps of smooth boulders which have been dragged down with the ice wall from the heights. At places these smooth rocks are as much as five miles distant before the glacier's end—proof that

the ice giant has shortened over the years; at the end of others none are to be found, for the glacier is moving further down before it melts; so from season to season, routes which have been mapped out a year before, change completely to confuse the traveller.

At places it is difficult to decide where the glacier really ends, for it becomes almost absorbed in the rocks—overwhelmed by them. Over all this, as arrested in its pace it permits of it, grass will even grow, alpine flowers blossom even as they move slowly down towards the snow streams in the green valley.

Not many of the valleys are green and verdant though—not green with a vegetation which can be useful to man. The country is a happy hunting ground for the sportsman with a gun, for here is to be found red bear, ibex, and sharpu; it is the home of the markhor, that magnificent member of the goat family which boasts a pair of horns which will favourably compare with any grown on an animal head. These horns are much valued by sportsmen, who grade them for perfection according to the number of twists, their matching and their length—the record pair being over sixty-five inches. Those who shoot those parts are able to tell from which part of Baltistan or the province adjoining, the beast has come. Then there are the snow leopards which are common in those parts, yet although their pug marks are frequently seen, because of their nocturnal habits, few are shot. The skin is a handsome piece, a pale grey background spotted with irregular splashes of a darker shade. Under the light of the moon the pale grey becomes a pure white.

The roads, which are those coming from Kashmir, Ladakh and Gilgit are difficult and at times dangerous even to experienced coolies and well-trained pack animals. Some of these mountain tracks being open but a few months of the year, the traveller is forced to change his route by the seasonal weather conditions, finding himself at times high in the mountains among the snows, at others on a dried-up river bed, and frequently walking along a narrow ledge which has been cut out from the mountain face, with overhanging rock at one side, a drop of hundreds, sometimes thousands of feet on the other, maybe into a foaming, rushing torrent which is bursting through the narrow gulley it has found or forced for itself.

The road down the Indus valley from the direction of Leh was described by a few Europeans who used it some forty to fifty years ago when it seems to have been the fashion to travel the route for a break from the heat of the plains of India. The road is narrow, at times a mere bridle path, green trees, shrubs or grass being seldom seen; "the scale of mountain scenery is enormous" as one moves slowly down with rich-coloured cliffs towering above, the space between them at times so narrow that an arrow could shoot the distance. Below are the river's grey waters which are laden with the silt being carried down; when in placid pools it appears "like watered silk", so thick is the content. During the day the sun beats piteously on this Indus valley, the heat becoming almost unbearable the light dazzling—both being accentuated by refraction.

Small wonder that the people of this land have suffered little from invasion in the past. Here and there, where a mountain stream flows through most of the year, the people have made full use of it, diverting it into their small plots of land; small walls of smooth boulders prevent them being washed away. Here will be found small groups of stone, flat-roofed houses, sheltered by walnut or apricot trees, among the patches of barley, buckwheat and rough turnips which are raised in scanty crops, for these people have not yet learnt the value of exchanging their seed with those who live but a few miles away; it is saved over from one year to another and like a family which intermarries generation after generation, becomes poorer and weaker of head.

It is amazing to see how cleverly these industrious people will guide the waters from a mountain stream, sometimes for miles, round the slopes to that part which is theirs, cutting out rock in one place, building up ducts in another. Even though one may not be able to see the silver flash of the water, the little stream is easily picked out by the thin line of green vegetation along each side of the thread, probably sown by birds which come to drink there.

On the way through there are to be seen traces of the Buddhist religion having once been practised in the country, for the rocks have been scratched here and there with the outline shapes of chortens; at times one will come across the sacred prayer

"Om mane padme hon". It must have been hard work for those who sought merit by so doing, for those who know of the values and quality of rocks declare that many of these weathered carvings are more than one thousand years old.

The capital of the country is Skardu which, at about six thousand feet, is at the junction of the two rivers, the Indus and the Shigar. Here it is estimated that the now increased Indus discharges about a quarter of a million gallons of water every second.

The valley of Skardu is west of this place where the rivers meet. The outstanding feature is a large ridge of rock which is crowned by the ruins of the old castle. Round this the Indus takes a great sweep, and here at the feet of the castle is the town—scattered groups of stone houses with flat roofs built of logs and covered with mud, set in groves of apricot trees. Also on a rocky hill there is to be found the Dogra fort, with thick walls built in a square, and round towers at each of its corners.

There is a story which will always be remembered by the Baltis attached to this castle and fort. Because of its remoteness and the difficult road into the country, it had not known invasion for many years. Even when in the eighth century the Chinese invaded Kashmir and forced the inhabitants to pay annual tribute, the men of Baltistan successfully defended their country. At that time they were Buddhists. Somewhere in the fifteenth century it came under the great wave of Mussulman propaganda which was put out in the time of Sikander the Iconoclast. Then at the close of the sixteenth century the Ladakhis tried to conquer Baltistan, which had thrown off all religious allegiance to them. The Balti forces under their Commander-in-Chief, Ali Mir, permitted their entry through the passes, lured them on, and then when snow had fallen and closed them in, attacked. The army of Ladakh had to surrender. With the main part of the Ladakhi army out of the way, the Baltis took up the offensive, they invaded their country; as Mohammedans now they went forward from one Buddhist monastery to another in Ladakh, destroying the buildings, burning the sacred records and books and looting them of their gold, silver and jewels.

From that time on there were no wars, just small raids by

the men of each side until 1841, the year of the Dogra conquest. The great Commander-in-Chief Zorawar having completed his operations against Ladakh, turned to the impregnable Baltistan. The Baltis tore down their bridges, intending to repeat the tactics used in their victory over the Ladakhi warriors of two hundred years before; the Dogras found themselves on the wrong side of the river, on exposed ground, short of food and with the winter coming on. Five thousand of their troops under Mir Nidhan Singh were sent to find some means of getting over the river; the Baltis ambushed them and cut the army to pieces. Only four hundred escaped.

Winter then set in; any hopes of the river freezing over proved hopeless, its waters were far too swift, and the remainder of Zorawar's army seemed doomed. Then the Dards came and showed them how to construct a bridge. Great beams were thrust out into the river until they became encrusted with ice, over these others were placed, extending still further across the waters, and so bridges of ice-covered beams were built from one bank to the other.

On these the remainder of the army crossed and in a surprise attack on the Baltis forced them to surrender. The Castle of Skardu fell and was sacked, the treasures being carried back to Leh, most of them having previously come from Ladakh. The Chief of Skardu was taken away into captivity, but before that, to ensure that there would be no revolts in Baltistan and no further ones in Ladakh, Zorawar made the vanquished army, together with all the population, gather in a great field, there to form into a large ring. In the middle of this were placed two tents, one being that of Zorawar and the other that of King Tsepal, the Ladakhi chief whom Zorawar had forced to take part in the campaign. Then two Ladakhi Mussulmans, Rahim Khan and Hussein, who had helped the Ladakhis in their last rebellion, were brought into the centre of the ring and bound between the two tents. A laige pot of butter was there boiling. The executioner went forward and cut off Rahim Khan's right hand and covered the stump with boiling butter, then he slashed off his ear, his nose, and finally dragged out his tongue, which was sliced off, after each cut slapping on ample quantities of the boiling fat to stop the bleeding. The wretched maimed victim

was then cut down and cast into the middle of the horrified crowd. The executioner's attention was next turned on Hussein, but this wretched victim was more fortunate, having only his hand hacked off and his tongue removed so that he might survive as a living example of what would happen to those who dared raise a hand against the Dogras. Rahim Khan died two days later in most awful agony.

The plain of Skardu is twenty miles long and five miles broad. The air is clear, the atmosphere dry, the sunlight fierce. A strange feeling comes over you there, walled in by steep mountains behind which are snow peaks, for these mountains are unlike most that you have passed on the way up, they are all of the same dull pink colour, yet they become beautiful with the glow of the sun; the valleys shade to mauve, and as the sun sets the pink takes on a deep red, the mauve changes to violet, being set off against the sharp white of the distant snow tops and the pure blue of the cloudless sky. As the now great Indus bursts forth from the valley, the gorge is narrow, the foaming roar of the waters terrific.

Shigar is the next most populous place. It is but one march from Skardu and lies up a side valley which is more fertile than most of the country thereabouts. Here are to be found walnut trees, vines, melons and of course apricots; in addition to this, caraway seeds are plentiful. The people dry the apricots and the walnuts in the sun; they form one of the principal exports from the province.

Above Shigar the valley becomes more lovely; with good irrigation, the land is fertile, there are orchards of pears, apples, apricots, terraced fields which yield good crops of hay, buckwheat, barley, beans and turnips. Almost the commonest of birds is the long-tailed, black-and-white magpie, whilst the hoopoo is found everywhere. The bushes are red with berries in the winter time, these being mostly wild rose; in the spring and summer, wild flowers are there in abundance.

In the southern valley of Shyok lies Khapallu, the capital of the Lower Shyok. It is really a collection of hamlets built on a long slope, shaped rather like an amphitheatre. Like all the towns of the north it has its inevitable polo ground which is as usual surrounded by a stone wall, and also its Raja's house.

The earth is good; the people have cultivated it in fan-shaped terraces which rise one above the other from the water's edge to a height of something like one thousand, five hundred feet; sufficient wheat is grown to feed its population, and there is one great grove of apricot trees, the fruit from this being dried for export.

At this part the river is wide and smooth, though quite fast in its current; it is far too broad for a bridge, and here, as in many places among these mountain provinces, a novel type of water transport is to be found. This consists of a large raft constructed of a framework of light wood which rests on fifteen or twenty inflated goat or sheep skins. These are blown up through one leg which protrudes through the floor of the raft. The ferry boat is propelled from one bank to the other by means of long poles if the depth is not too great; in deep places paddles are used, but for the most part the river is made use of, the ferry-men being clever navigators with the currents, and one always expects to finish up at least half a mile down river in spite of the watermen having first pushed well up stream clinging to the slow waters close in to the bank.

There is a sizzling sound as the air escapes, occasionally one notices that bubbles surround the raft, but with so many skins, the chance factor of the raft sinking is much lessened. The ferry-men untie a string which opens up the leg of the skin they know to be the cause of the trouble and blow down it, just as they expect their passengers to do with those skins which happen to be nearest to them. In spite of this the raft has always become lower in the water by the time the voyage is completed, the small waves lapping over the side at times.

It is indeed a strange land for in one place glaciers are found, in another, near to some white marble rocks which are just above the point where the Bralda and Basha—the main tributaries of the Shigar River—join, there are hot springs which record a temperature of 108°. This is a place to which the sick are brought; close by is a quaint Mohammedan shrine, those who attend it live well on the offerings of the pilgrims. Here and there pieces of rag flutter on sticks—usually found round Buddhist and Hindu temples.

In the features of the Baltis there is a Mongolian likeness to

the people of Ladakh, but physically they are larger; many of them have signs of Aryan blood, and the Dard element is more common than found in Ladakh. But there are two distinct types of Baltis; the first are those of the upper classes, the descendants of the many Rajas who once divided the land among themselves; they are a fine bunch of men and women. Their features are almost Grecian with oval faces and straight noses, often the eye-brows are straight or beautifully curved, and they are fair of skin. Some have the hair directly above the forehead shaved off, otherwise their rather coarse, straight hair hangs in long locks. These people of the Raja class dress in white, the men and boys frequently decorating their hair or their caps with bright flowers.

The peasant types are distinctly Mongolian, being square, short of stature, though generally slightly broader and taller than the Ladakhi. Their faces are sallow, the hair worn long, either hanging in a straight fringe all round a coconut-shaped head, or as curled locks on either side of it. One is surprised to find among them some whose eyes are hazel-coloured, others definitely blue, and these people frequently have brown and not black hair as always found among the Mongolian races.

They are a happy people, why I cannot imagine. The creases of their faces are all horizontal, their manners are pleasing, and they are gentle and patient, qualities which have doubtless come down from the time when they were Buddhists. As coolies they are strong and willing, although rather independent, and even when carrying a load of sixty pounds, they seldom complain of the discomforts and trials of the trek—the master can go on, so can they.

These peasants wear very closely woven tunics, much like the Ladakhi's coat-gown, but falling to just below the knee, straight pyjamas, a low-crowned hat made either of the same material or of knitted wool, and boots of untanned hide.

The colour of their clothing is drab and earth colour, so that you are almost upon one of them sitting by the wayside before you realize that he is there. It is really the perfect camouflage; dirt.

They are inveterate smokers. If the going is bad or the day cold so that the usual happy smile leaves their faces, one has but

to hand over a small amount of tobacco, and they are happy again. They do not use a pipe; they make up a small mound of earth, drive a hole in the top with a finger, then bore a lateral tunnel with a piece of stick. First the tobacco, then the red hot charcoal goes in the upper hole, and taking turn and turn about they kneel down and draw at the other end of the "pipe".

Although a comparatively barren country, the people being followers of the prophet Mohammed, polygamy—the reverse to polyandry—is practised here, each man being permitted as many as four wives. The result is that no woman remains unmarried, and the population becomes greater than the land can maintain, with the result that they must either go out or starve. So that unlike the Ladakhis they leave their homeland to work in India; many will be found working as coolies in the hill stations or navvying in the Punjab. Then, after leaving wife and family at home perhaps for many years, they return with the savings they have managed to get together, this becoming a small fortune in their own country.

The lives of their women are very different to those of the women of Ladakh. As soon as one enters a village, instead of being greeted by smiling women standing in their doorways, those Muslim women of Baltistan slip away inside the houses or round corners, so that they should not be seen.

The village, if not dominated by a Raja's house, has as its principal building its mosque or Ziarut. This is usually built after the style of the Shah-i-Hamadan Mosque in Srinagar, and seems to be the meeting place for the village.

One Balti who was quite a wealthy man, even by the standards set in Kashmir, in explaining how he managed his business of exporting dried fruit told me he had one elder son with several young brothers in Srinagar, another elder son in Peshawar also with several brothers and yet another elder son together with several brothers in Leh. When I asked him how many sons he had he proudly exclaimed "seventeen". The doctor of a mission who was with me said, "You see he makes no mention of his daughters—though he might proudly tell you of his sons-in-law. He also has six daughters and there must have been some who died in infancy." I was quietly working out that this would mean a rough average of seven children

from each wife, when as though reading my thoughts he said "and all from two wives who still remain active healthy women."

From this it can be seen that unless the country can be made to grow more food, with these strong men and fruitful women populating it, assisted by the practice of polygamy, those who are born there must go elsewhere to survive. It is estimated that about a thousand men go "abroad" each year to work, but this is not enough, and the result is that whereas the coolies of Ladakh have clothes to wear and flesh covering their bodies, the peasants of Baltistan who do not dwell in those parts which produce food, are poor, thin and ill-clad, their rags of clothes hardly covering their shivering bodies in the cold winds. A coolie's most precious possession, one for which he will almost die, is his coarse piece of blanket, which is much like sacking. And it seems that the wives of these men have never learned how to sew, for the stitches used to mend a tear are as large as the average child of five would make.

Not many miles below Skardu the Indus again bursts through great mountain gorges, and if one were to follow it, eventually one would come to Gilgit which lies to the west of Baltistan and has the North-West Frontier of Pakistan on its western border. The road is rough and bad, it is only suitable for coolies; in summer the heat is intense over this bare almost treeless track. At times the river has to be crossed, but it is too swift for a raft, being compressed between great cliffs of rock. Here one comes across the now only occasionally seen rope bridge; these are peculiar to this part of Kashmir, they consist of three thick ropes, each made up of twisted birch or willow twigs, which have been cast across the water from one precipice to the other. Two of these are used as handrails and below them is one for the feet, viewed from the end they form a V shape. Each of the hand rails is separately joined to the thick foot rope by cross pieces, forming a kind of "cat's cradle". The ends are secured to trees or failing that to great rocks. The rope bridge is made to hang in a graceful loop which allows it to swing in the wind; it is safer that way. Some of these bridges which are considered to be more permanent, have the lower rope doubled and tied

together, these two are covered with twigs again; on these animals are made to cross, the small sure-footed mountain horse with load gingerly steps forward and slowly proceeds for there is no turning back. In one place at least there still remains a sort of pulley "bridge". This consists of a thick plaited leather rope—some six or eight strands strong. The traveller sits in a rope loop which is suspended from another ring which runs on this rope. He has a line attached to his precarious seat and with this is pulled across, rather after the fashion of a breeches-buoy.

In places the road is made by driving stakes of wood into the rock face, others are rested across these and covered with shale. It is surprising how loose the track will get, how many stakes will have rotted, how close to the cliff face a man will have to get because of the weakened portion, before it is repaired. I have been told by more than one that it was not thought necessary to mend a rope bridge or a made-up, shelf-like track until someone had fallen through or over it. This was explained to me in all seriousness just as I was about to cross one after commenting on the frayed handrail.

The most generally known Gilgit Road is that which goes from Srinagar to Gilgit, a distance of about two hundred and twenty-five miles—fifteen marches. Until close on the end of the last century, the mere mention of the Gilgit Road to a Kashmiri villager terrified not only him but his whole family, for at Gilgit a garrison was maintained by the Kashmir State; this had to be kept supplied, and forced labour—known as "beggar"—was "recruited" for the work. The so-called road was then but a track which could not be used for pack ponies, with the result that coolies had to carry the loads, and the Kashmir State sepoys press-ganged these men from outside the city. On news reaching the villages that the soldiers were searching out coolies, the able-bodied men and usually the whole village made for the hills or forests leaving only the very old and the sick behind. There they would remain until all possibility of the men being taken had passed. If they were so unfortunate as to be caught unawares, only large bribes would buy the sepoys off; for the rest, the families wept and prayed. Even then the aged fathers would not give up hope and followed the troops to where they had collected, for many more men than were needed were brought

to that centre, and here a few could still be bribed out. It was known that a large percentage would never return to their families. The years thinned the breadwinners, the fields were tended and the crops gathered by the old and very young.

The hundreds of coolies were collected together at Bandipura; here they were loaded up with the sacks of food for the garrison, loads which were two and even three times the recognised pack of fifty pounds. In addition to this they had to carry their own rations, these being about two pounds of rice per day, a carrying crutch, a frame of sticks, rope for the back load, and topping all, a bundle of straw with which to make the straw shoes they would need. Their clothes and protection consisted of whatever they had brought for themselves; most had somehow managed to bring a blanket. It is little wonder that dozens died on the way, as they crossed the snow passes, slipped on the rough track, or dropped from weakness and exposure.

The dreadful thing was that even when they eventually reached Gilgit there was always the chance that they would be sold into slavery or captured by the tribesmen of that part. Tyndale-Biscoe tells of the grandfather of one of his servants, who had been forced to make this march, being exchanged for a Chinese dog; later he escaped and somehow managed to return to the Valley to tell his story. And it was not unusual for those fortunate ones who were returning to be press-ganged again to carry loads that dead or sick men in caravans following had dropped; whilst there was no assurance that next year they might not again be taken.

Then the threat of the Russian advance into India through Kashmir caused the Government of India to take over this Gilgit garrison, and in order to ensure maintenance of lines of communication, in 1892 a military road was made between Gilgit and Bandipura, the place where the coolies had been loaded, for there already existed a road as far as that town. The making of the road in those days was a great engineering achievement in the short space of time that it took. Pathans from the North-West Frontier were used for the work, at times they worked with spade in the hand and rifle at their elbow, the way being through tribal areas where the peoples resented the

making of a road; but despite all the difficulties it was completed. Much of the work and fighting undertaken in its making was described by Knight in his *Where Three Empires Meet*, a book which became a favourite prize for schoolboys in the Victorian age for no less than three Victoria Crosses were won in the expedition which he describes so vividly.

"On the completion of the road the large, ill-disciplined, ill-equipped garrison that was maintained at enormous expense by the Kashmir State, was supplanted by a small but extremely efficient force under British officers," he says and goes on, "Since then the tribesmen have been reduced to subjection, the Pax Britannica has been extended to the furtherest corners of the Gilgit Agency, and the influence of Britain far beyond."

It had culminated with the subjection of the Hunza-Nagars, tribes of raiders who had lived by pouncing on the caravans which passed from Kashgar and Yarkand, to be followed by a small expedition subduing the Chilas.

The country, like Ladakh and Baltistan, again covers about one hundred and fifty miles on each side of the great River Indus.

Even to this day, because of the heavy snowfalls and danger of avalanches, the road is closed to pack animals during the winter and spring months. Up to the Burzil or Kamri passes the country is well wooded and reasonably fertile with some glorious views from the tops of the passes, and on the way, especially at Gurais, some delightful camping grounds are to be found, among flowering meadows near firs and pines, with fishing and a fair chance of bagging a red bear. Until long after the British garrison was established there no European ladies were permitted to go beyond these two passes, not even when accompanied by their husbands. Over the 13,500 feet high Burzil pass and the road to Astor, the country is immediately arid and bare, with high, precipitous mountains, again a sportman's country with magnificent markhor and fine ibex. Most of the marches are now over rough rock wastes which, during the summer months, radiate the terrible heat of the sun; there is no wonderful scenery to relieve the landscape; you find yourself thinking back to stories of the "beggar" coolies who would have trodden this road with heads down,

backs bent, feet tired and stumbling, just staggering on for days, with eyes on the ground, perhaps fixed on the heels of the man ahead, their loads only lightened by that which they ate of it—leaving less for the journey back; the man who fell was hardly noticed by those who were with him unless he happened to be a relation.

Gilgit, together with Astor, Bunji, Chilas, Hunza, and a few other places is often referred to as Dardistan. Gilgit is the most important place, being nearest the frontier; a British Political Agency was stationed here. The town of Gilgit is the only town of any importance; it has been built on the Gilgit river at a place which is some miles above where that river joins the Indus, and at a height almost the same as Srinagar.

Much of the Gilgit valley is well cultivated, with fruit trees; in the fields wheat and barley are grown; in those which are available to water, fairly good crops of rice, but where cultivation has not been attempted, the land is barren, though some of the hillsides carry large woods of fir and juniper, and higher still there is birch.

The country is hard, bleak and inhospitable—the sort of place one immediately associates with the word "out-post"; one can imagine the disappointment, if not horror, of a married British officer on learning that he had been posted to that garrison, but it was not so for the single man to whom the great attraction was the shooting and the polo. Like all towns and large villages in the mountains, Gilgit has an excellent polo ground which is still used although the British have gone, for the men of the country excel in horsemanship and polo is their national game.

Just as the valley of Kashmir is the home of the fairy tales, so also are the Gilgiti legends famous for those parts; fortunately a great number of them have been preserved for all time by Britishers who have served there. Many of them are fables, others doubtless have a certain amount of truth in them; they contain the history of that part; in them can be seen the character of the men of Gilgit as they have always been, cruel, hard and fearless, and of their womenfolk, lacking nothing in courage and cruelty.

One story so told will never be lost to the people; there is

little doubt that it is authentic history and concerns Trakhan, one of the most famous of all the Ras of Gilgit. Here it is.

Many years ago there was a dashing young Ra of Gilgit who married the only daughter of a good family of Darel. They lived happily together, and as Queen Soni she was very much loved by the people, being beautiful and kind, She bore the Ra one daughter. The Ra was admired by all; as was to be expected of him he was the superior of all his subjects in horsemanship and "the manly sports"; his physique surpassed that of all his men. His one great passion was polo, and during each of the months of the year when the pass was open, he used to take a team of Gilgit men over to Darel to play against a team which consisted of the seven brothers of his Queen. The play was always fairly even, each winning side receiving from the losers some prize; at first it was a few goats, then fine clothes, next the horses they had ridden, and gradually, as the years passed, the games became keener with jewels, land and slaves as the stakes, until finally the two teams staked their own lives, the losers to forfeit them to the wish of the winners.

One can imagine the polo played on that fateful day. The finest polo ponies were brought out, each side determined to win—being Gilgit men the thought of what would happen were they to lose, never entered their heads. The play ran even, five all, six all, seven all, then the men of Darel scored the eighth goal, they had but one more to win the game. The shouts of those who crowded and crushed round the ground ceased, as did the blaring of the bands at this dramatic hour; there came only the sound of thundering hoofs, of the crack of the polo sticks striking the hard mulberrywood ball, the yell of a player as he shouted to another of his side. Then the Ra of Gilgit struck the ball, it hit the stone wall and bounced, he caught it in his hand, and as polo is played there, tore away with it through the goal. The game was now eight all, and the Ra was to take the "toiki" —a more or less free shot, he, by the rules of the game, riding half way down the field, throwing the ball in the air, and striking it as it fell. The Ra's own band started to play crazily with excitement, his few supporters cheered until their throats closed dry. With the Darel players on either side of him, he threw the ball, struck it, and as it flew towards the goal, with

cruel spurs and whip, all sped after it. It fell short of the goal, but the Ra's mount was famous throughout the land, he was there first; the ball was through the goal, then as with their last gasp they tried to pick up the ball and so make bad the goal, he was again there first, and the fatal ninth goal was scored against the men of Darel.

Of such are the men of those parts, that the Ra in the flush of victory immediately demanded the penalty from the losers; it was his right, none could deny that. But he could not take as slaves to his castle the brothers of his Queen, he could not sell into bondage men of such quality and breeding, and so, with no consideration for the superb game that they had given him on that and many previous occasions, with no thought to his robbing himself of further games, he had all seven of the Queen's brothers beheaded on the polo field. Terrible though it was, the men of Darel who had come to watch, and outnumbered by hundreds those few men of Gilgit, considering it fair, allowed the team from Gilgit, together with its supporters to return untouched, whilst they buried their dead.

A messenger with fleet feet raced ahead with the news so that when the champions arrived home they were received with songs of victory, dancing and feasting. Only one among those that waited did not rejoice, that was Queen Soni; she had dearly loved her brothers who had adored her always. In that night of Gilgit's rejoicing her love for the Ra turned to bitter hate; then the blood of the hills rose in her and she became determined to avenge them. It was easy for a woman to put an end to her man, and the next day the green vegetables in the Ra's evening meal contained some poisonous herb, so that with the dawn he did not awaken. Her only regret was that she had not dared feed him a poison which would have caused his last hours to be a writhing agony, but had she done so, he might have guessed that it was she who was responsible, and in his death throes have ordered her an execution the same as her brothers had suffered, or even one like that of all the old and useless people of Gilgit in those days, they being carried in a basket to the top of a hill and cast over the precipice.

Even then her hatred, which had overcome grief was not complete; it remained within her, and when her son was born

about a month later, she saw in him a part of the Ra, whom she could now only think of as the murderer of her brothers. So soon as she was able to do so, she took the baby, pushed him into a box and cast him on the waters of the river. Through rushing gorges over rapids, round swirling pools the box went down the Gilgit river and on into the river Indus, until it came to rest on a sandbank close to Hodar. A poor peasant villager happened to come across it as he was gathering driftwood; his wife took pity on the tiny babe and brought it up with her own son of the same age. They gave the foundling the name of Trakhan. He brought them good fortune and from that time their flocks of goats increased, their little crops of grain became heavier, the amount of ghee they were able to make increased; they became wealthy farmers according to the standards of that part.

Then when he was about sixteen years of age Trakhan's foster-parents told him how he had come into the family. He dwelt on what he had heard, became determined to find the country from which he must have come, and together with his "brother" set off for Gilgit.

In that town Queen Soni then ruled alone, but although she was still not old, she was frail, always ailing, and the men of Gilgit knew that they must really have a Ra to rule over them.

The two boys reached a place called Baldas; here they found a spring, and could look down upon the valley of Gilgit. On the morning following their arrival there a strange thing happened in Gilgit, the cocks began to crow louder and more vigorously than ever before, and those who listened swore that they heard each of them cry, "Baldasar thum bei!"—"A King may be found in Baldas!" Everyone awakened at this, men rushed to tell the Queen, what was happening, others went in search of the king in Baldas, but later returned to tell the Queen that they had only found two youths who declared that they intended to settle there, the one saying, "Here I shall build my house, and here my cattle pens. There I shall cultivate the land and feed it with water from the spring"; whilst the other, who spoke like a lord said, "Here I shall have built my fort; here shall be stables made for my horses, and there a polo ground which will be better than that to be found even in Gilgit!"

And the Queen ordered that the youths be brought to her. She was at once smitten by the likeness of the now handsome Trakhan to the Ra she had poisoned. She asked the youth from whence he had come, who his parents might be, and he told her all he knew. Then she was certain that he must be her son. The years had softened her; she was sad and lonely at times, for her daughter had married and left her castle, and she told him the rest of his story, pronouncing him to the men of Gilgit as their rightful Ra and seating him on the "Nilo But"—the coronation stone of the Ras of Gilgit. He was later to become the most famous of all the Ras of Gilgit, his rule was wise and strong, he extended the frontiers of his country, "he increased them to beyond Hunza and Nagar, right to the confines of Cathay." His nephews Girkis and Mughlot—the sons of his sister—he made the first rulers of Hunza and Nagar, their descendants being the Mirs there today. His memory will ever remain with the people of Gilgit, for there are so many songs of his great deeds and his wisdom now held up before the youths of those hard mountain parts as an example of what they, who also are born of that land, can achieve.

The men will sit for hours telling such stories as this to the young men and boys, stories of blood, honour, swords and wars, whilst the women's stories, though not as bloodthirsty, are also those which rekindle a determination in the girls that the land, the gold and the women of Gilgit shall never be taken, whatever the sacrifice demanded or the price paid to hold them.

The people of Gilgit are Mohammedans of both the Shia and the Sunni sects; the people of Nagar are of the Shia sect only, those of Hunza of the Ali-Ilahi sect—that is, believing that Ali is God; the others are Mulahis.

Yet there are signs that the Buddhist faith at one time also reached as far as this, for Knight tells of walking to the entrance of the Kargha nullah, through which there is a track leading on to Yaghistan, and of a carving of the Lord Buddha to be seen on the face of a great rock.

The chiefs of Gilgit "living in their mountain fastness", were in the days gone by, "notorious for their raids into the countries of their neighbours, which they made with impunity".

At the time of Moghul power, Gilgit came under the suzerainty of Kashmir, but with the power going over to the Afghans, Gilgit became independent; several descendants of the old chiefs, as well as neighbouring chiefs, gained power, but each held it for very little time, always being killed off by some rival. Then with the coming of the Sikhs, several Muslim rulers appear in the pages of Gilgit's history, but in 1842 Yasin drove out the rulers of Gilgit, and Nathu Shah, who remained there to ensure his staying in power, made a friendship pact with the stronger of the neighbouring chiefs, and sealed this off by himself marrying the daughter of Gauhar Aman, and marrying his sons off to the daughters of the Hunza and Nagar chiefs.

Then in 1845, with the break up of the Sikh rule, Nathu Shah offered his services to Maharaja Gulab Singh, and he was appointed as Governor of Gilgit, two European officers accompanying him there. It is said that the Chief of Hunza became jealous of him because of these two officers, with the result that he invaded the country, was unsuccessful, but killed Nathu Shah. Next Gauhar Aman, the Chief of Punial, and Yasin invaded Gilgit. Maharaja Gulab Singh sent troops from Kashmir, and these, together with reinforcements from Astor and Skardu, defeated the invaders. The two officers commanding the Maharaja's garrison were Bhup Singh and Sant Singh; they governed the country peacefully for a while until the sons of Gauhar Aman took up the sword of their father, and in 1852, with the help of the Dards and the people of Hunza, they did not attack, but drew Bhup Singh together with a force of some thirteen hundred into an ambush. Eleven hundred of his Hindu troops were massacred, and two hundred, taken as prisoners, were sold into slavery after they had been converted to Islam; not a spiritual conversion, but a painful and frightening physical one, they being tied down to stakes one after the other and circumcised with swords. It is recorded that only one of the women camp followers escaped; she reached the other bank of the Indus by clinging to the tail of a cow—an animal sacred to the Hindus of course—which was swimming across, and was so able to get to Bunji to tell of the horror.

Gauhar Aman remained master of the country until his death in 1856. By that time Ranbir Singh had become Maharaja and in

1859 sent out a strong force under the command of General Devi Singh, who conquered Gilgit; the "enemy fled away before this force and he occupied the district as far as Yasin". In 1865 a punitive expedition to Hunza failed: taking advantage of this the tribes around Gilgit rose; they invested the fort for some time, but reinforcements arrived and they dispersed. After that, though tributary to Kashmir, the chiefs of Hunza and of Nagar gave occasional trouble, once even capturing the frontier fort of Chaprot.

There came the final phase. Under the command of the British Colonel Durand, an expedition was sent out and captured Nilt by assault, then pressed on over the most difficult mountain conditions, glaciers, snow, precipices, against a brave, strong and determined foe. The fanatical determination of this enemy may be judged by the message the defending Vizir of Hunza sent to Colonel Durand, "This fortress of Chalt is more precious to us than the strings of our wives' pyjamas". Yet the British troops under the Colonel, captured the whole country right up to the Pamir and Chinese frontier. This was followed by a handful of troops under Sir George Robertson conquering the Chilas.

The people of Gilgit, Astor and some of the countries beyond are a race with features of the Aryan type, and they claim to be of that stock. The majority of them are medium of height, hardy and strongly built. Again the descendants of the chiefs differ from the others, no doubt because of marriage from time to time with the most beautiful women either captured or made wives in order to ensure peace with a neighbour. These men are tall, many are fair-complexioned, with pale hazel or blue eyes, and they are extremely handsome. The features of the men of Gilgit are usually long and oval, the nose strongly curved, the expression sinister if not fierce; generally they are not as fair as the men of the Valley of Kashmir. They usually wear dark woollen clothes, with a cap which has been universally adopted by most troops fighting in cold places, being a long woollen bag which is rolled up until it fits over the head, it being possible to unroll it to cover the ears. Of these men Neve says, "They are an independent and bold race, more straightforward than the Kashmiris and less bloodthirsty than the Pathan"—the latter

being Afghans who have migrated over the frontier—"All are Mohammedans except the tribes of Kafistan."

Those Aryan features, those blue eyes, that light complexion, where does it come from? Not a few of the sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of the chiefs who once ruled in those parts, surprisingly claim to be descended from one of the Generals of Alexander the Great, if not from the Emperor himself. There is no record in history of his having visited those parts, but the people of Gilgit maintain that he came as close as the Tash-kurgan and the Killik Pass, and then sent an expedition down through Hunza to Gilgit. It is known that Alexander did visit Dir, and it is believed that the expedition to Gilgit was to move on to Chitral and then join the main army at Dir.

I have never seen it hinted at in any book, but I dare to suggest that these Aryan features, blue eyes and the occasional tinge of gold in the hair found among those men of Gilgit—and also those of Kashmir—might have come about by their owners having been descended from the prisoners, deserters, or even soldiers who had become lost from the forces of Alexander. It is known that until not long ago on the North-West Frontier of India, a captured European who was fortunate enough to be the possessor of red hair was treated with more respect than his fellows, who, if not ransomed, suffered a ghastly, unmanly death. Although not released, he like the others, was handed over to the women, but remained alive to "husband" the widows, so that they might breed red-haired sons. Natural red hair is considered among some of the tribes to be a sign that the owner is the descendant of their particular prophet, if not The Prophet. A beautiful red-haired camp follower—and most "red-heads" have blue eyes—would make a fitting concubine for any King or Chieftain; a powerful, magnificent, red-headed soldier of the forces of Alexander, a fitting lover for his widow, or even husband—if he happened to be an officer—for a daughter he had been unable to marry off to one of his own rank. Can it be from such alliances as these that the red heads, pale faces and blue eyes have come to those parts?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The States and Cities of Poonch and Jammu

To the south—slightly east—of Gilgit lies the State of Poonch, which sits between the Kashmir Valley and Pakistani Punjab, with a range of mountains to the east and the river Jhelum to the west as natural borders. It is a country of which little has been written, yet most of the visitors who entered Kashmir in the old days by the most popular road, one which runs from Rawalpindi in the Punjab to Srinagar, passed close to it, if not through it. No doubt they were concentrating upon the road, which although fairly good, has its terrors in twists, hairpin bends, blind turnings and precipices, especially when the visitor was forced to rely upon the driving judgment of car drivers or tonga wallahs whose one idea was to get to the end of the journey.

The surrounding mountains are just as magnificent as in the other parts of Kashmir—in fact are merely the other side of those viewed from the Valley, their northern slopes a mass of firs and pines. The immediate surrounding hills are strangely of the same height, so that they appear like wave upon wave of dark green pines and firs, shaded only by the valleys or by distance. These valleys are cleft out in such a way that it would seem that the whole was once a great plateau, the softer stones and soils being washed away, and that which remains in rib-like formations being of the harder stone which with time has clothed itself with trees. On the tops of a number of these hills with naturally scarped faces, are the ruins of ancient forts, each so placed and planned that its position, with its inaccessibility, protected it against escalade, leaving the attackers to starve the defenders out from it. These hill forts are relics of the days when the country was divided up into small tracts,

each with its own ruler. The depths of the valleys are alive with ice-cold babbling brooks which run over smooth, brown sandstone rocks, although here and there in the passage of the waters, there appears a jagged white limestone piece which has withstood all attempts to smooth its surface. From among them all, often from a rock island, trees spread their branches over deep pools which are frequently the resting place for many fish, the most popular being the mahseer, before they brave the rapids to swim up stream.

Foot tracks lead up from the water to lone farmhouses; here and there is to be found a wider track which cattle have made or where the loaded mule is led, for there are few roads fit for wheeled carts. Flowers grow there in profusion during the spring; small fields of corn, green in springtime, yellow in autumn, are to be discovered at odd spots, these remaining where they have been for hundreds of years. There is none of the bleakness of Ladakh, Baltistan or Gilgit, although the same steep tracks over rocks, sharp ascents and descents are there, but they are fringed by bushes, trees shade them, and just when one is feeling the need of a cooling draught, a small clear spring bursts from a rocky grassy bank. Poonch reminds the man from Britain much more of his homeland than does the Valley. The Jhelum flows through the State, as does the Poonch river; a road follows this from Kotli to the city of Poonch. It seems that in so many places camping sites are to be found, small *margs* with close-cropped grass, a stream close by and a friendly if inquisitive people soon round the camp.

It is at first surprising to find the large percentage of the men among them who speak English, then as they proudly talk of their service in the Indian Army, of their father's service and their grandfathers', many of whom are still alive and draw pensions, one remembers that this little State claims to have provided a larger percentage of army volunteers than any other in India during the Great War of 1914-18. Thousands of them have always found service in the Indian Army, returning home on pension to take over the small-holding which their father has tended against that time, he then being able to retire to gossip, rejuvenated by the stories his son has told of his own

army service. During the time that these Poonch men have been away they have kept touch with their homes by sending back amounts from their pay; small sums they would seem to be outside Poonch, but of greater value there, where much of the food is grown, and the necessities of life are small. These men of Poonch—and this applies to Gilgit men also—will sometimes remain away from their wives and families for five or six years, the old father or even the wife tending the land, a small portion of which most of them own and return to for a few weeks to see their families; the wives will have remained faithful, for the women of Poonch have always been held to a high moral standard. Although the men of Poonch may, when away, contract a temporary marriage—in any case the Muslims amongst them being permitted four wives—they demand of their women that they should behave as though their husbands were at home, the humiliation brought upon him in the event of his wife's adultery being so great that he will demand the most severe penalty of the woman. Only recently I had personal knowledge of a sepoy who had been away from his wife for some years. His brother had written telling him that his wife was becoming loose in her morals, then that she was pregnant. The husband returned home on leave, saw his brother, next the brothers of his wife, and then his wife; she was in the kitchen sitting before the stove when he entered, as she stood up to greet him he saw her condition, and without a word fired a burst from his sten gun; she staggered forward to fall at his feet, and well knowing why he had done this, with her dying gasp begged his forgiveness. Her brothers and her father knew why he had taken this dramatic step; they made no protest; in their eyes he had only done as they would have with one of their wives under such circumstances, and he was allowed to flee back to his unit.

In the villages or close to the few houses round the farms there is always to be seen a man or woman washing clothes in the manner of the place, by stamping the dirt out of them in a water-filled, hollowed-out stone by the stream. In that part there are also to be found the little round huts, often built of straw, housing the large mill-stones which grind the corn grown thereabouts. These are usually attended to by the old

man who has retired from active work, his charge for grinding being a percentage of the flour.

Here again in this country are to be seen the fair complexions, the blue and the hazel eyes, the brown or gold-tinted hair. The men are in the main handsome, they are not as hard-looking as those of Gilgit; among the youths especially there is a blending with the rather effeminate young men of the Valley, but they are essentially men, their stride is long. They are taller than the others of the State, though not powerfully built, and it is seldom that one sees a fat Poonchi Muslim. Generally their faces are long, the complexion light brown, the nose large, aquiline and well shaped; quite frequently the black hair is wavy. In all they are a good-looking race, and this applies to both men and women, who even in their old age retain their good looks, the men then growing beards, and the eyebrows seeming to extend forward. What is more noticeable is that unlike the peasants and farmers of the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, they are not filthy dirty; you can with safety get close to them and enter their houses.

Those who have known the man of Poonch as a soldier or as a servant—and large numbers migrated to India to work as such under British officers and residents—will agree that their foremost quality is reliability and faithfulness; as servants, if they like you, they will remain all their lives, if not, they will leave you at once, for theirs is a distinct line drawn between those they like and dislike. The women are not as bold as the women of the Valley; they also go unveiled; their beauty is of a different quality from those sisters over the mountains, who have a Jewish appearance. Although mostly Muslim, they do not scamper off round the corner of the house like the women of Baltistan when they see a stranger about, neither do they stand and stare at him as do those of Ladakh; they just continue with their work as though unaware of his presence, while the children run out to look at him, standing at a distance. Unlike the men of Gilgit who scowl, the man of Poonch will usually greet one with a friendly grin if not a smile.

From the smooth surface of the hard giant boulders in the Poonch Valley, it is believed that at one time a glacier moved where the river now runs, yet strangely enough on the right of

that river bank, at Tattapani to be exact, hot sulphur springs with valuable medicinal properties are found.

According to the 1941 census, about nine-tenths of the population were of the Muslim faith. The Raja who was a Hindu, was subject to the Maharaja of Kashmir. The unwalled, oblong-shaped capital of the State is also called Poonch—in some books it is still spelt Punch, but the pronunciation is Poonch. The population is under ten thousand. The valley in which this city has been built opens up as one approaches it and is rather like a miniature Valley of Kashmir. The view is clear for miles ahead, with Poonch built on a low plateau overlooking the river which flows quietly, parallel with the hill ridges. The old fort-palace with its massive walls, seems to rise from among the hundreds of houses in the bazaar of narrow, stone-paved streets. The Raja's white-walled and red-roofed new palace is built behind them all and dominates the whole, with a background of green hills and far-distant snow peaks behind which sits Gulmarg.

The Muslim schoolboys of Poonch always remember two landmarks in the history of their city. The first is 1814, when Ranjit Singh made his attack on Kashmir through Poonch; he sought the co-operation of Ullah Khan, the then Raja of Poonch, but this ruler being a Muslim had Afghan sympathies, and gave an evasive reply to the request, pleading his inability to comply with the Maharaja's wishes since his son was then a hostage in the hands of the Duranis. Ranjit Singh's forces advanced with the Maharaja at their head; the small forces of Poonch fell back, the Raja ordering his subjects to leave the town and villages, thus cutting off supplies from the Sikhs, who however, reached Tosa Maidan in their advance. There they suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Afghan forces of Rajouri and Poonch. Retreating, the Sikh army burnt the fair city of Poonch to the ground.

Later, when Poonch was still an independent hill State, it was annexed by the Maharaja Gulab Singh, when he defeated the combined forces of the Afghan Governor of Kashmir and the Raja of Poonch. Then, in order to show the people of his new State that the last of the representatives of the main line of rulers would never be able to return, he had both of them

brought out, their heads cut off and enclosed in an iron cage which was exposed in the city for all to see. So, in 1819, died Sher Jangh Khan, the last of the Muslim rulers, together with his nephew Shams Khan, and Raja Dhyan Singh, a Dogra and a Hindu, became the ruler.

Their hatred is not so much against the first Dogra ruler of Poonch as of his brother, the Maharaja Gulab Singh, who was paramount to him, and they tell how in 1835 when "some of the men of Poonch dared a small revolt against him, he came down in person and suppressed it, and then had certain of the prisoners flayed alive before him. And when the executioner hesitated before he did this awful thing, the Maharaja accused him of being chicken-hearted and asked him if he had been asked to perform upon his father or brother."

After reminding you that Didda, the most powerful Queen ever to rule over Kashmir, was a Princess of the House of Poonch, the schoolboys, having by this time completely forgotten their feelings against the Hindus and Sikhs go on with, "And you must of course be knowing that but for the interference of the Viceroy Lord Reading there would now be a Poonch Maharaja, because the priest-ridden old Maharaja Pratab Singh would have selected as his heir his adopted son Rajkumar Jagat Dev Singh, who was only fourteen years when he took him, who was second son of Sir Baldiv Singh the Raja of Poonch, who was second cousin to Pratab Singh and great-grandson of Gulab Singh's brother Dhyan Singh". This rumour arose after a rather unsavoury blackmail case in London in which Raja Hari Singh, the Maharaja's nephew and closest relation, was involved as the victim. Then further to prove the case for Poonch, they go on, "Even at the funeral of the Maharaja Pratab Singh it was Jagat Dev Singh who performed the obsequies required of a son and heir". Jagat Dev Singh died in 1940.

It was rather surprising to find how well kept the city was, boasting electric light, telephones and water channelled from nearby streams, all in the midst of comparative nothingness; the quite excellent roads which intersect it frequently running for five or six miles outside, the gardens gay with flowers. Still more pleasant to discover is the most excellent rest house

—the Raja's guest house. To sit on the lawns before this and watch the glorious changing of colours in the surrounding hills brought about by the setting sun, is a fitting finish to a good day's sport or a long trek, as in the air fresh and clear you listen to stories told of the day's play with rod and gun, for there is good fishing in the river and plenty of game on the slopes above.

Poonch is renowned for its bear hunts, its Rajas have always been the keenest of sportsmen, and seldom has a season passed in which there have not been at least two bear drives in each of which "honks", as they are called, forty or fifty bears have been shot, for they abound in the dense forest slopes round about. The shikaris of Kashmir insist that great numbers of black bears migrate in the autumn to Poonch where there is little if any snowfall during the winter.

Whereas the red bears of Gilgit spend the winter's hibernation in a cave, the black bears of Kashmir, where the mountain slopes are covered with firs, pines and other great trees, find a hollow tree trunk for those months of rest.

Unlike the red bear, which shikaris declare to be a more or less harmless creature only killing what he needs for his own food, the clumsy, rapacious black bear does an enormous amount of damage, killing off hundreds of young pine trees by ripping away the bark to get at the gum which exudes and of which he is as passionately fond as of honey, or by eating or trampling down fields of Indian corn—another favourite of his—destroying in a night sufficient to provide a poor peasant family for the whole season.

When the corn is ripening the farmers do their best to protect the crop from bears which invade it at that time; it is on the Indian corn that they fatten for the winter. Fires are lighted, the smoke drifting across the field; bears dislike this since they cannot get the sniff of a hunter through the smoke. In the middle of the field a small platform called a *machan* is built and on this sits a guard, his job being to scare the bears away when they come—they always feed at night. He blows horns, throws stones, or by pulling a long string rattles a can with stones in it, the can being tied to a tree or pole which may be a hundred yards away from him. But he is usually too

scared to come down from his perch to frighten the bear away; what is more, the bear knows this, and so feeds away happily in the long corn until the dawn, when it makes for the forests, there to hide up and sleep during the daylight hours.

His liking for meat is said to be acquired, hunters of a century ago speaking of meat-eating black bears as one now would of a man-eating tiger, but in these days the black bear is a bullock killer. It has been said that this desire for meat was first brought about when a cattle disease killed off many of the buffaloes; bears came across the bodies of the dead animals, tasted them, and took a liking for beef. In any case, since the bear is a killer of the cow—an animal sacred to the Hindu—a Raja would feel perfectly justified in despatching the bear.

It was whilst stopping in the guest house that I learnt a lot about bears, most of it from the head shikari to the Raja, the man who collected together hundreds of beaters for each of the hunts. It was from him that I learnt that bears breed once a year, the litter usually being two cubs, which remain with their mother for a year, going into hibernation with her for the winter during December, and remaining in the hollow tree stump until March, when, although they have no wish to go, the mother bear awakens and pushes them out into the snow to fend for themselves. She then returns to her bed, and within a few days the new litter is born. As is only to be expected after a mother bear has slept for over three months, her offsprings are pathetic little creatures with bodies which are almost hairless; it seems impossible that they can survive, let alone grow into great black bears which can bring down a full grown bullock.

For yet another month she remains in the tree stump, and when she finally stumbles out she is thin and weak; her limbs are stiff, so that the first day she only moves around for exercise, perhaps to chew on an old bone as the life comes back into her gums.

Very slowly she weans her cubs to the sunlight, she is herself not too strong, very different from the great fat mother bear which went into hibernation four months earlier, and she is now feeding her babies. Their first solid food is a few nibbles

of the young shoots of grass, their teeth by this time having come through the gums, their fur has grown, and their eyes opened on the eighth day. As the weeks pass, she takes them higher into the hills with the thawing of the snows, then as they get bigger she gradually brings them lower into the valleys, until at the time when the mulberries are ripe, they get near to the villages to raid the groves at night. The whole time she carefully keeps them away from man, the one animal she has learnt to fear. When she senses danger she calls her cubs with a low whine, and they race back to her, standing for protection beneath her forelegs; if she has to move away, they run beneath her belly unnoticed.

The old shikari took me up the hill some miles away to where he knew an old she-bear had been hibernating that past winter. He suspected that she had had cubs; it was not until later that I fully appreciated the cunning of this experienced hunter, for he had waited for a day when the wind blew away from the tree stump close to the rocks where she had made her bed. We climbed the rock from behind, carefully selected each foothold so that no stone should fall, and on reaching the top and looking down, to his as well as my own astonishment, we saw the she-bear sunning with her one cub. Even then, although the wind was away from her, she sat up and lifting her head, with long snout twitching, sniffed the air many times; she knew that danger was nearby, and although the shikari was certain that she did not see us, she bundled her cub quickly back into the tree stump and followed it.

She was thin and gaunt, her coat matted, and it was difficult to believe that this lumbering creature could possibly step through the undergrowth and over twigs as lightly as a ballet dancer so that none could hear her; amazing that she could be so clever that when shot but not killed she would feign death and curling up roll down a slope to gather herself up at the bottom and make off into the jungle; surprising, yet, I am assured, a fact, that she can tell by smell whether the man who comes towards her is a coolie or a hunter, although I must admit one can smell some coolies—especially shepherds—hundreds of yards off. The one she takes little notice of, the other she has every reason to fear.

South of the Valley of Kashmir and on the other side of the outer Himalayas, lies the State of Jammu—pronounced as it used to be spelt until the turn of the century, Jammoo. It borders on the Punjab and its capital, which is also the winter capital of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, bears the same name as the State.

Here everything is very different from the other states and provinces of which it is a part. The houses are built after the fashion of those in India and Pakistan, with flat roofs; the majority of the populations are of the Hindu faith; the climate becomes tropical, for the city lies on the edge of the Punjab plains and is only twelve hundred feet above sea level—the rest of the land south of it is below that; it is protected from the north and north-east by the mountains, and lies at a slope to the south catching the full power of the sun.

The city of Jammu is built on a spur from the first of these slopes and about two hundred feet above the level of the plains, on the banks of the river Tawi, which in the old days, used to be crossed by bridges of boats—usually washed away during the flood periods. Now a fine modern bridge spans its waters. It was also the railhead of the North-Western Railway, but has been cut off since the line runs through Pakistan, and communication with India is now by way of a very excellent road which has been constructed between Jammu and Pathankot, this then joining up with the Grand Trunk Road. The land through which this passes is not rich, in many parts it is boulder-strewn, and wide concrete culverts cross the road in places.

Writing of the city about seventy-five years ago, Drew talks about riding through the narrow streets on an elephant and looking down on the roof-tops of the houses. I did not see an elephant whilst I was there—although there might be some in the palace stables, and the red brick houses are now usually two or even three stories high, with flat roofs as before and of the design to be found all over India, since they provide excellent and reasonably safe "bedroom" accommodation during the heat of summer. A few camels are to be seen in the streets, the narrow winding bazaars remain as they were a hundred years ago and doubtless will be for many years to come—being a most necessary part of the East. Until

"smellies" are invented, they will still be worth the eye of the still- or cine-camera. An effort has been made to widen and keep clear the main roads passing in and out of the city; these can still be described as "gay with colour in one of the most oriental and picturesque of towns", for here are to be seen the costumes of the people of Jammu, of Kashmir and of Baltistan, mingling with the traders from the Punjab and Delhi.

Here are to be seen the saffron-robed monks with shaven heads; here also are the bearded and long-haired Sikhs, wearing the most colourful of turbans, for the majority of the Sikhs of the State live in Jammu—they are generally a handsome race of men, and their women are rather beautiful. To the newcomer it seems strange to come upon a husky, black-bearded Sikh, after taking a bath, with waist-long hair down and combing it in the sun—but this is quite a common sight.

It was in Jammu that I met one of the most lovely girls that I have ever known. I was staying the night at the bungalow of a missionary, and had hardly arrived before the most powerful voice started up in song from the building almost adjoining. This was a Gurudwara, a shrine-temple of the Sikhs, and the bellowing voice was that of the priest, who, it seemed, when the spirit moved him sat just outside the doorway of his temple, and expressed his joy or otherwise in song; and this over a microphone. I went over and saw him; he was terrific in size and bulk with black hair-covered torso, arms and legs; he had a grand head and a most fascinating face—bearded of course. As he sang verses from the Holy Granth, he closed his eyes: it was as though he was singing the Songs of Solomon, the verses starting much the same each time, but ending with continued repetition, speeding up in tempo and blast. And this I was told might go on for hours, just when mothers were trying to get their children to sleep in order that they might enjoy a few hours of peace before they themselves rested. And this, I was again told, would awaken me well before dawn—and it did. It seemed that nothing could stop it, for the gentleman himself, when he did cease, told me that come what may, nothing would, since he had a mission in this world; it was to tell the people how bad they were, how bad he had been, and call them to the right way as he now tried to tread it. He

had before been a most successful business man; all had been happy with those in his world until one awful day the daughter whom he greatly loved, had been taken ill; she had nearly died, and when she recovered, that ray of joy which was his and his alone, for his wife had passed away, could not move her legs nor her arms, nor could she rise on her bed. Very slowly the paralysis of the arms left them, gradually she could begin to sit up, and they—himself and her ayah—anxiously waited for her legs also to regain their lost strength, slowly they did, then the right foot, but not the left, that was not to be.

As we sat on the edge of his charpoy or string mattress bed and talked, I heard what I at first took to be a boy singing. I was taken round to the side of the house attached to the temple and saw her; she was sitting on a cushion on the terrace with a sitar across her knees, plucking and picking at its many strings and singing to its mandolin-like notes. She wore a glistening, long-sleeved shirt of yellow satin, trimmed with silver and gold beads, her useless withered little foot tucked beneath the other leg of her white silk salwars, which are tight-ankled, very voluminous trousers; her lovely wavy black hair hanging loose, held to one side by a cluster of live yellow flowers, her laughing dark brown eyes were edged with black make-up; fine gold bangles, perhaps a dozen of them, clustered on her wrists; round her throat was a necklace of heavy gold, exquisitely carved and set with stones. She was about sixteen years old, the age at which most girls of her race would be thinking of marriage and wondering who their parents would choose for them. Yet in spite of her knowing that marriage might not be for her, she had laughing, glistening eyes—all for her gorilla-like, booming but glorious-voiced father, whom she worshipped. On one side sat her singing master, also a Sikh. Behind her patiently stood an old white-haired ayah, the one who had been her nurse when she was born and remained with her ever since; she was wearing the simple white sari of a widow, her feet bare, forming a fitting background to a very lovely picture, for the girl had a beautiful face, the kind of beauty which would be admired almost anywhere in the world, a beauty only matched by the liquid notes which poured, at times prattled, from her pretty little lips. She knew that we

were there, half-acknowledged us, but went on for a while, then handing the sitar to the ayah, she laughed and to my astonishment said in English, "Father, are you not going to introduce to me your friend?"

How little this man knows of psychology, I thought, that he does not realize that were his daughter only to sing before the microphone, he would have thousands in his temple compound instead of the few; people would welcome instead of dread the click as they heard the loud speaker switched on. Then I realized that it would not be right for a respectable girl to sing as I had thought, for this was the East, the Indian continent, and it cannot be. And so when I reached Kashmir a little later and found that it was strawberry time, I sent him a basket of the luscious fruits each day, knowing that they would be shared by her.

Strangely enough, although the Sikh is very close to the Hindu socially, his creed is often quite close to that of the Muslim. For instance, before handling their holy books, both must wash; that of the Muslim commences with, "There is one God", whilst that of the Sikh starts of with, "There is none else but one God". Both must pray five times a day, both condemn idol worship, both religions look with favour on one who takes up the sword, and in neither case are they bidden only to take food among those of their own belief. Both kill the animal they are to eat by draining its blood, the only difference is that whereas the Muslim slits its throat, the Sikh makes a cut across the back of its neck—much like the executioner.

Reverence for the sacred cow is seen here in Jammu, for they wander at will over the road, ignoring the hooter of car, stopping in the middle of the street to sniff at a used paper bag or the skin of a fruit, which they eat, and even lie down there to chew the cud. Over the centuries they have learnt to despise the ordinary man to whom they are superior, and they treat the non Hindu with dumb insolence. Now and then you will see a man—Hindu of course—lightly touch one as he passes her, afterwards touching his forehead with the same hand as he bows slightly. I have often seen a fruit-shop keeper, after I am certain he has overcharged me, pull off a prime banana from a bunch and offer it to the passing cow. I saw the chief clerk of

a bank come out with a dish from his tiffin carrier, open the lid and feed to a white cow four chipatties—flat, unleavened, breadlike cakes—afterwards holding his hands together as though in prayer to the cow; and I was told that he did this every day. I wondered if it was his wife, who had made and cooked them over the hot stove, or he who fed them, who gained the merit. It was all over in a few minutes, just as is the usual prayer in the Hindu temple.

Here the bulls also roam the streets, I suppose it is because the females of the species are so readily available, their diet of rubbish, or maybe the heat; anyway they are perfectly safe and placid so that one wonders where these people would get their bulls for the ring if they took to bull-fighting. I saw one great bull limping along dragging a broken hind foot; it had moved like this for months, but no one would dare kill it—it was sacred. So very different is the attention meted out to the bulls and bullocks which are used to draw the carts, they being goaded on with sticks, which are rammed from behind and between their hind legs if they fail to move quickly enough; there are few without broken tails, these having been twisted to crinkled shapes by their Hindu drivers, who strangely enough will paint their great horns in colours and garland their beasts of burden at the time of festivals. The treatment the Muslim and Sikh tonga drivers lash out on their poor underfed horses is no better; neither of them seem to think of the future days; it seems that they only consider the journey they are then undertaking, and weep at the death of the animal seemingly quite oblivious of having been responsible for its premature demise. The treatment of animals in the country district is generally different, though; there they are cared for.

Here the temple bells ring at all hours; to me it appeared that when the worshipper went to pray, as he entered the temple he was handed a few petals from a large brass dish before a priest; a few come with flowers and garlands. The worshipper then goes before the "god" and gives the chain which hangs before it a pull, thus ringing a bell to tell the "god" that he is there. The flowers are next placed on the god, which might be a stone figure, or just a symbol, or they may be scattered before it, usually together with a few coins. He again

rings the bell to send his prayer to heaven, and walks out. At times one will see one on his or her knees, with hands together and silent lips moving—they have some very special prayer to make to the god—and remain in that attitude for perhaps a quarter of an hour, after which they get up, ring the bell and walk out as though unconcerned, seemingly convinced that their wish will be granted.

The Kashmiri pundit performs a different kind of daily worship, as I saw from my houseboat on the Jhelum, when two orthodox members of the faith from separate houses came down to the river in the early morning, each with a water pot in his hand. Both took a bath in the river and said their prayers. The older of the two then threw water in the air; he had lost both mother and father, and therefore spoke the names of his ancestors for seven generations back. Coming from the water the younger of the men went up to where his wooden pattens had been left, and from a piece of cloth by their side tipped out some earth which he formed into the shape of a lingam. The earth had been carried from the Takht-i-Sulaiman, and after he had either paid his respects to it or worshipped it, he gathered it up and unceremoniously threw it into the river. In the meantime the other pundit had returned to his house, gone straight up to the idol he kept there—a *thakur*, which was a fossil from the Shisha Nag—garlanded it with flowers, scattered a few grains of rice before it, and then sprinkled it with the water he had brought with him from the river. He then put the saffron tika mark on his forehead, as do all pundits after their morning bath, and drank some of the water which had dripped from the idol. Both were now ready to go to their work. Some pundits, after bathing and worshipping at one of the city temples walk barefoot round the Hari Parbat, and although writers of over fifty years ago were saying that this practice was becoming less and less common, I have seen a bare-footed old pundit completing his journey and stepping into a waiting tonga which then took him home.

From a distance, coming towards Jammu from the sun-baked plains of the Punjab, through scanty green or yellow rice and wheat fields, and after mile upon mile of flat, uninteresting country, the city can appear rather lovely. The distant back-

ground is the Outer Himalayas, with the snow-clad peaks of the Pir Panjal range crowning all; the nearer background, the purple grey and dark green of the hills, setting off the golden balls and tiny turrets which surmount or stand out from the dozens of silver convexed, cone-shaped, spires of the Hindu temples glistening in the sun. All this is seen from across the river, which in summer and autumn is thin and clear as it wends its way over the silver-pink, rounded pebbles of the river bed, one which is wide and flat, for in the spring the river is flooded; then the waters are dull with the silt from the mountains. A wide canal from the river Tawi helps to control these floods and at the same time irrigates large areas around the city of Jammu.

Parts of the old palace, which at places are built right up to the cliff face, have been there for nearly two hundred years. As the rulers came to the throne, so they "improved" it by making their own contribution. Naturally, to the people of Kashmir there is an especial interest in the palace, for Gulab Singh ruled the Jammu State for twenty-four years before he added Kashmir to his domain. This old palace is now used as the State Secretariat, just as is the old one in Srinagar.

The State is filled with historical remains and interesting buildings, mostly they are temples which have been built to the glory of one or other of the many Hindu deities, usually containing carvings in stone to their memory. In places there are caves, famous as the abode of a revered religious man and some are still frequented by them; in other places are found sacred springs round most of which rag flags fly from high poles.

In this province of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, fruits which do not grow in the others are to be had; bananas, oranges and mango. Here also is coal, admittedly of poor quality, but commercially useful, whilst from the belts of pine trees which reach across the mountain slopes, resin is drawn off, this being tapped into small earthenware pots in much the same way as is rubber, then collected up into tins and carried either by coolies, donkeys or camels down to the road side from which lorries convey it to the refinery from which turpentine, oil and resin are exported in considerable quantities.

The people of this State are Dogras, claiming to be an Aryan race. The highest caste of these are the Dogra Brahmins—originally they were the priests, but now they are also found as cultivators and clerks. Next in caste standing come the Dogra-Rajputs; from these the rulers have sprung, from their ranks come some of the finest soldiers to be found in all India. The Dogras are not large men, usually being of an average of about five feet four inches in height—seldom does one see a tall Dogra. They are slim, with square, somewhat high, shoulders, thin legs, but walking very upright. Their complexions are of a lighter shade of brown, with generally small features, a slightly hooked nose, brown eyes and in all an intelligent expression. Their hair is jet black and so cut that it forms a curly fringe coming from under the pugaree or turban; beards are worn and even when growing a moustache, this is turned upwards—no doubt to give the man of the Rajput caste, especially the soldiers, a fiercer expression. In all they are a good-looking race. Of them it has been said by officers under whose command they have served, "their muscular power is not great, but they are active, untiring, have physical endurance, can suffer hunger and heat—providing they only have to undertake light marching, but heavy labour or extreme cold they cannot stand up to. They are faithful to those whom they elect to serve."

Then there are many sub-divisions of the Rajputs, the Mians and working Rajputs. The Mians have a curious custom which was eventually put down at the request of the British representatives in Jammu and Kashmir. The men never married among their own people; in fact it was impossible for them to do so since it was their universal custom that as soon as a girl baby was born she was taken from her mother and either buried alive or left exposed in the forest. Some suggest that this was done in order to save the cost of the eventual dowry and other marriage expenses, others that the work undertaken by the Mians was men's work, and that women were useless to them. So the Mian used to take a wife from among the castes which were just a little below their own, a practice which is contrary to the usual custom prevailing in India.

It is therefore not surprising to read that "close, queer

friendships between men and boys, similar to those which existed in the old days in Greece, are here seen, no attempt being made to hide them. These continue until long after the man has married; they go on until the boy himself becomes a man."

Another Hindu custom which has disappeared has before been mentioned; that being suttee or sati—the burning of widows. Many of the Rajas had large numbers of wives and concubines, and the stories told of the terrible deaths of these women are numberless, but that told by Drew, which he heard from an eye-witness, is of interest since it concerns the death of Hira Singh, the son of Raja Dhiyan Singh, ruler of Poonch. His widows and concubines, twenty-two in number, committed this suicide at a place near Jammu. A large square stage of faggots was built up under a rough roof; between the faggots ghi—or ghee, clarified butter—was placed to increase the violence of the flames. The women seated themselves on the platform, the wood was set on fire, "and the burning was finished without a voice or a scream being heard from them."

These terrible customs have long since died out. But the Muslims cannot point the accusing finger at the Hindus on that score for records show that in 1619 the Emperor Jahangir forbade Muslim widows emulating their Hindu sisters' display of devotion by an even more horrible immolation; he had discovered that just before his arrival in Rajauri a Muslim child-widow of twelve years of age had been buried alive in the grave of her old husband, and that it was becoming a practice there.

There are other castes of the Dogras; the Khatris—among these are the higher class of traders and writers; next come the Thakers, the cultivators. Then last of all are the lowest caste—even now not recognised by many Hindus as the people of that "way of life", they are what were known as the "untouchables", now referred to as the Harijans—later still as the scheduled castes: dark skinned—often black—they betray their low caste in their features, if not in their rasping voices. They do all the filthy jobs, the sweeping and work of a similar kind; even their shadow cast across the food of a Brahmin would cause it to become unfit for him to eat; the wells from which

they draw water become defiled by a bucket from which they drink being dropped into it, so that they have their own wells. Many of these beliefs have also passed away, although they die harder than one is led to believe with orthodox Hindus in this province of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Hindu and Muslim Festivals in Kashmir

THE Hindu customs and festivals which have survived are colourful and happy occasions. The year is filled with them; it seems that the Hindu servant can always find some festival as an excuse for a holiday.

The one that I first saw in Jammu was Diwali—the festival of lights—which is held at the commencement of the winter. In some parts of India it is celebrated for a week, with crackers being let off each night. In Jammu, as in many other places, on the night of Diwali hundreds of little earthenware dishes are filled with castor oil into which cotton wicks are put and lighted. These are placed at equal intervals along the cornices of the houses, on window-sills and on door steps, so outlining the shape of the house with glowing lights. The name of the festival is without doubt taken from the Hindu word "diva", which means lamp. This is the occasion when the people worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; it is the time when they take out their money and worship it; when the shop-keeper takes out his books, worships them and makes up new ones for the next year. It is also the day throughout which men gamble in the belief that it will bring luck for the coming year. It is a pretty festival, this one of the lights, one which has been improved upon with the passing years and the introduction of coloured electric light bulbs, even the trees outside the houses of the wealthy now being decorated with many hundreds of them.

And on this as well as some of the other festivals it is the custom to call on relations and friends with gifts of sweets most attractively done up with coloured cords and with some decorated with thin silver foil. When the fruits are in season,

the choicest of these are also presented; when there are too many to be eaten, they are passed on to the poor.

Another Hindu festival is Holi. This is a real carnival occasion, usually coming in March; then the people are changing into their lighter clothes. For this feast white is worn, for it can be sent to the dhobi and boiled clean the next day, since on Holi coloured powder is thrown in clouds over the people just as confetti is scattered about at a wedding. They smear the powder on each other's faces, in their hair, over their beards, and then to complete the frightful mess, so that it cannot be shaken out, syringes are brought along and water squirted freely. We read of the Maharaja in the old days joining happily in the festivities which lasted for days; on the last of these the people went into the streets scattering the powder and squirting water over all at will. None dared to object, they usually joined in the fun—and strangely enough the dhobies were among those who made, and were in, the greatest mess, possibly because it is the occasion when they—of low caste—are permitted to celebrate freely.

Basant Panchmi is a Hindu festival to which the servants of the Maharaja and the Government did not look forward with pleasure. This is the Festival of Spring, when everyone wears yellow; if not completely clothed in it, then a yellow pugaree or a dupatta—scarf. It was the day on which the Maharaja, also dressed in yellow and seated on a yellow cushion, accepted presents of a percentage of each of his State servants' wages which, one after the other they brought and laid before him. And although the Maharaja was in Jammu at this season of the year, his officials and servants in Srinagar also had to make their contribution, the rulers place being taken by a gaddi or a yellow cushion. The givers came forward in correct order of precedence, from ministers down to gardeners—the more humble servants, because of the small amount of their pay, being permitted to make a contribution of fruits or flowers. Then followed songs, music and dancing by the nautch girls dressed in tight bodices and net, tinsel-spangled and trimmed skirts over long pantaloons, tight at the ankles, round which were silver bells matching those on the wrists, with each girl affecting a different pose, some brazenly laughing, others with

shy-girl, downcast eyes, but always in the direction of the men, the watching women being of no account.

The Hindu festival of Dasehra I saw celebrated in Srinagar. It is surprising the number of these festivals the Muslims join; in this it is almost as though it were their own. Dasehra is held in memory of the victory of Rama, or Ram, one of the great heroes of Hindu mythology, over Rawan, or Ravana, the King of Ceylon. The many incidents of this particular war, which all Hindus have learned from the book *Ramayana*, are performed during the days preceding the great day of Dasehra, then immense images of Rawan and his relations, usually three in all, are set up. They are of paper built on a framework of bamboo and stand about thirty feet high. In the evening of the day, Sita, the wife of Ram, and the one whom Rawan has stolen, personated by a boy dressed up, is carried forward and lets fly an arrow at the central figure of Ram. At this signal it is bedlam let loose, the cannon crackers go off—these representing the blast of the artillery—the faggots resting at the feet of the images of Ram's enemies are set ablaze, and they are all blown up, burnt and destroyed. It is a terrific firework display held on the polo ground, in the old days with the Maharaja present, now with all the principal people of the city sitting in the favoured positions, but quickly over-run when the fires start.

The festival takes place in the autumn, just when the cold weather is commencing, so that winter clothes are brought out, the women—and the men—wrapped in gay coloured pashmina shawls or wearing heavily embroidered, loose dressing-gown types of coats. The glorious chinar trees surrounding the ground are also changing their colour and are flaming red, just as though they also were joining in the festival, making a grand contribution.

The Muslims also have their holy days, and just like the Hindus, those which they consider the most important in Kashmir, although they may not be the same ones as are celebrated in other parts of India or Pakistan. Srinagar is naturally the centre of the Muslim festivities, just as Jammu, with its large Hindu population is that of their belief, but here again all communities seem to join in making them general holidays,

and like those of the Hindus the dates change, some of the Muslim festivals being controlled by the appearance of the moon.

This applies in particular to the Id-ul-Fitr celebration which follows the thirty days of the fast of Ramzan, when no good Muslim will take food or water, smoke or partake of any pleasures during the hours of daylight. At this time except for the very old and the sick, the latter completing their fast after they have regained their health, they may only eat and drink between dusk and dawn, just before dawn taking a bath so that they may start another day of fast clean of body. Since Ramzan falls during the hottest time of the year, one can imagine the awful strain that this penance must be. You can watch the fasting Muslim becoming thinner, you can see him slowing up in his work; for some reason unknown to me, many of them also cease to laugh during that time. The mosques are very full on the Fridays—which are the sabbath days of the Muslims—of those days the last being the most important of them all. Then comes that final one of the thirty days, the sunset of that day is eagerly awaited; all eyes are turned to the skies, for if the moon, which is always new at that time of the month, appears, then the fast may be broken that night, but if not, the faithful must wait for yet another day, when the fast may be broken, whether the moon is seen or not. This is followed by the feast of Ramzan, which the people celebrate by filling their own bellies, and those of their friends—even Hindu friends if they can take the food—after which they return to the normal way of life. During this period of the fast the gifts to the mosques have increased; because of their fasting period, the faithful have considered their religion the more, even those who do not go without, being reminded of it by looking at those who do, and all Kashmiris, being superstitious make their contribution to the poor box. In fact on all the five religious days of the year the preparation of food to be given to the poor and needy forms the labours of the women; that of the men it would seem is in the giving, although I have seen veiled Muslim women standing at their doorways, dispensing charity to beggars.

One of the greatest of all Muslim festivals is Id-ul-Zuha.

Strange as it may seem, it does not have any connection with the Prophet of Islam. It commemorates a great event in the life of an alien prophet, that of Abraham, on the occasion when he was about to sacrifice his son to the glory of God. The only great difference between the stories as written in the Bible and the Koran being that whereas Abraham's son is called Isaac in the one he is called Ismail in the other. According to the Muslim traditional records, the Prophet Abraham—or Ibrahim as there recorded—who built a temple at Kabiba, had a vision there one night directing him to "sacrifice in the name of the Lord, thy God", and the Prophet sacrificed sheep and camels. The vision appeared again, on the second occasion insisting on the sacrifice of "the thing dearest to thee—thy son". Early on the morning of the tenth of the Islamic lunar month of Zil-Hajj, Abraham rose, bathed both himself and his son, put on new clothes and set off for the Mount with the boy following. On the Mount he blindfolded his son and laid him down on the altar, tying him hand and foot, then as he drew forth the great knife from the sleeve of his long toga, the Angel Gabriel appeared and as the Prophet lifted his eyes to the heavens, removed the prone figure of the boy and replaced it with an Arabian ibex, which Abraham slew as, gripped tight in his trembling hand, the knife fell. It is this awe-inspiring, great act of devotion to his God that on this day is celebrated.

That is why it is obligatory on all Muslims who are able to afford it, to sacrifice on that day an animal, usually a sheep or a goat, sometimes a camel. These animals are carefully selected and bought days, sometimes weeks, before, conscientiously conforming to the prescribed requirements of a young beast without blemish. On this morning, always wearing new clothes with white predominating, but every colour present, the Muslim men and boys make either for the mosques or on to the maidans for congregational prayers. The women remain to pray at home, although on rare occasions they might be seen together behind the great crowd of men. These prayers demonstrating the brotherhood of all Muslims, irrespective of rank or station in life, result in high officials of the State rubbing shoulders with beggars and men of poor means, whilst the prayers are led by just anyone chosen from among the con-

gregation. The prayers finished, the Iman delivers a sermon, and although those who listen may not understand his words, since they are often spoken in Arabic, they know that he is telling them of the significance of the great event the day commemorates, and calling upon them to rededicate themselves to go forward with God's message of peace on earth and good-will towards all men. The finish of the sermon is the signal for each of the congregation to turn and embrace the man nearest him then move among the crowd embracing all and sundry.

Returning to their homes, they exchange greetings with the rest of their family, embrace even the servants, and give money to them as well as to the children. The animal, which has been given a bath that morning, is then brought out, often it has splashes of yellow here and there on its coat. The sacrifice as performed by Abraham is then made, usually by the head of the house or some elderly relation, after reciting a text of dedication. The larger portion of the meat should be given to the poor and needy, some sent with due ceremony to relations and friends, and the rest cooked and served in the many dishes of grilled and roasted meat which are eaten the day through.

The Muslims' most important festival though is Miraj-i-Alam, the anniversary of the night on which the Prophet ascended from Jerusalem into Heaven. Next on the list is Id-i-Milad, which is the anniversary of the Prophet's birthday.

The greatest of the Buddhist Festivals is Lord Buddha's birthday. The Sikh's most important one is Guru Hargovind's Day.

Christmas is a day which is observed to an extent by all, the day when shops are closed, the day when people who have any contact with Europeans wear their best clothes, whatever their faith. There are few Kashmiri Christians, for as Canon Tyndale-Biscoe has pointed out, it is not easy for a Hindu or a Muslim to change his faith to Christian without being turned out from his family home, persecuted, and even "killed in an accident". But there are the Europeans who live there, admittedly far fewer now than before, and even those were reduced in number during the winter months when they went down to the plains. On Christmas day the servants appear at your door, whether

it be a bungalow or a houseboat. They bring with them their children, all of them being in festive dress, just as they had been for one of their own celebrations, and they stand and look—waiting for the sahib to give them a present. If they are your own personal servants, then you are expected to give each some article of clothing, in addition to handing some money to the head of the family, and sending a present to his wife, for she would not have come with them, although she might come separately to your wife if she happens to be there. Then come the floods of other people, the traders will bring presents, but the others come to collect baksheesh even although you never remember having seen them before, until in the end—unless you have started to celebrate early—you get worked up to a shocking state at being denuded of all you had in your pocket. Somehow with me this temper lasted for only a short time, for I began to remember that with so many of them they really did believe that it was "better to give than receive", that they so looked forward to that particular day of the year, would be so proud to walk round to show those friends whose masters or patrons had gone to the plains what the sahibs had given them. It was in all so little to each one, and like their own festivals a time of goodwill; the winter had come, they were shut into their valley, business was bad, the store cupboards were being slowly reduced in their contents. And Christmas in Kashmir can be a wonderful time; so often the first fall of snow comes by that date, the smell of pine logs floats over the air, the snow-stilled quietness is such that the music from the little organ in the church carries far, as does that from the radio sets tuned in to Christmas programmes. And when returning from church, or taking a short walk, meeting those of the land, it never strikes them that although you might be a European, you might not follow the Christian faith, so that you are greeted with a smile, a lifting of the hand in salutation and though they may not speak English, yet they always know, "A Merry Christmas, sahib!" And hearing it in that country where poverty is to be found everywhere, you feel ashamed that you could earlier have been annoyed, and now wish you had bags of gold to scatter, that all of them might be happy and merry with you on that day, for you know they really wish you well.

In Jammu, the Muslims and the Hindus are as distinct from each other in their beliefs, their festivals and their worshipping as they are in the rest of India and Pakistan. This also applies to Poonch and the other border States where the Muslims predominate. They tolerate each other, very seldom clash, but never blend. In the Valley it is different; in so many of the festivals and superstitions if not the beliefs, one finds traces of the Hindu in the Muslim and vice versa. Never does the Christian move one iota from his beliefs, neither does the Buddhist. Then it must be remembered that in the Valley this wholesale conversion from Hindu to Muslim, back again to Hindu, then returning to Muslim, went on ding-dong between every few generations in the old days; the other parts of the country escaped it. Small wonder that there is this trace, not of one being absorbed by the other, but a tolerance, even an interest in the other. It seems that in their conversion, they never entirely gave up those beliefs they had learnt as children, for there never seems to be an inborn hatred or despising of those of the other faith. A certain amount of credit for this must go to the Dogra rulers, who although orthodox Hindus had shown many signs of indulgence, such as giving money for the repair of mosques, and under whom the State maintained mullahs to perform certain ceremonies, such as marriages.

In places one finds the same shrine or spring being adored by both Hindu and Muslim, though the Hindu will claim it as his, the Muslim as his; as for instance in that place where there is an imprint of a foot in the stone; the Hindus maintain that it is the foot-print of Vishnu, a Hindu god, and naming it Vishna pad, they worship there; the Muslims, on the other hand, declaring it to be the imprint of the foot of the Prophet, calling it Kadam-i-Rasul, pray there.

My quite innocent question to one old Hindu who had taken me to see a holy cave in which was a kind of grotto, as to its story; his answer that it was the home and death cell of a great sadhu—a holy man of the Hindus—and the immediate denial of this by the Muslim driver, who insisted that in it there once lived a famous Punjabi fakir—a holy man of the Indian Muslims—ended in blows between them, for it was in Jammu Province and both were Dogra. Finally I had to separate them,

cursing the day that I had troubled to go to see the cave. We journeyed back with the Muslim and Hindu sitting next to each other in front of me looking straight ahead in stony silence, a great relief from the outward journey when each chattered to the other, and I had every reason to be concerned over the lack of the driver's attention to the winding narrow road.

There does not seem to be a very great percentage of either of the faiths who practise their religion in the really orthodox fashion and live their lives as laid down by the books. Few fail to observe their own festivals though, while many also enjoy those of the other religion, and when you attempt to discuss their professed religion or way of life with them, it is surprising how little they really know of it in the Valley. Among the Hindus in any event, all over India one finds a different story attached to not only the various festivals, but also the divinities, while each part has its own particular god the people worship; this applies frequently to each caste.

Of most beliefs and customs the Hindu and Muslim teachings and practices are the reverse. For instance, the Hindu worships the cow, the Muslim eats it—that is if he is permitted to do so. To the Muslim the pig is unclean; the Sikh considers it a succulent dish. The Kashmiri Muslim shaves his head, whilst the Sikh grows his long. The Sikh does not smoke, but is permitted to drink spirits; with the Muslim it is the other way about. The Muslim sabbath is Friday, the Hindu holy day Tuesday. The Muslim buries his dead; the Hindu, like the Buddhist, burns his. The Muslim is circumcised, the Hindu, and especially the Sikh, will suffer much rather than agree to the operation, even on a doctor's advice. The Hindu worships in temples —their women flock to them each day—and also before their gods either as a statue or a picture in the home. The Muslim should always worship with others in the mosque; he is not forbidden to worship in the house (his womenfolk should) but men should not do so unless they are sick. Then we come to washing; the Hindu will take a complete bath at least once a day, the Muslim will wash hands and feet before he enters a mosque to pray—from the filthy state of some of the Valley Muslims, it seems they seldom pray. There is no divorce

for the Hindu; it is easy for a Muslim to divorce his wife, and under certain circumstances for the wife to divorce the husband.

The Hindu will decorate his temples with pictures, statues and carvings of gods and other figures. The Muslim is only permitted to adorn his mosques with scrolls and texts from the Koran; there is nowhere a picture of the Prophet Mohammed. The Hindu believes in reincarnation. The Muslim believes in a hereafter. Both believe in God; the Muslim prays direct to him, the Hindu to his own smaller god and there are few of those of the Valley who do not believe that the stone replica or the symbol of him is the actual god. The majority of those people you see in Hindu temples are women and children, but in the mosques of the Muslims women are seldom seen. The worshippers are men, the children their sons.

In the Valley both will pray or plant prayer flags before some saint's grave that is said to bring good fortune to "give" something; both will drink of a spring which is said to cure some ill, though it may be reputed to have been made to flow by either a sadhu or a saint, it matters not. Both remove their shoes before entering temple or mosque; that is common everywhere though, just as are the beggars who congregate outside the mosques on Fridays and outside the temples on Festival days—and there are very many smaller "holy" days than those celebrated by all; the ordinary pundit may have forgotten them, the beggar has not.

Writing way back in 1895, Lawrence, who was responsible for the land reforms in Kashmir, in his book, *The Valley of Kashmir*, gave several detailed chapters on the religions and the social life pertaining to it in the Valley; it seems that very little has changed since those days. He talks of the principal persuasions of the Muslims, the Shiaha and Sunnis, who were for ever quarrelling; of how the Sunnis were on friendly terms with the Kashmiri pundits—the Hindus—and though they very strictly observed the fast of Ramzan, they did not keep Friday as a day of rest; few of them made the one journey in their lifetime to Mecca, as is incumbent upon every good Muslim who is able to afford it. He says, "In their hearts they are Hindus, and the religion of Islam is too abstract to satisfy their superstitious

cravings, and they turn from the mean priest and the mean mosque to the pretty shrines of carved wood and roof bright with iris flowers where the saints of the past lie buried." These greater shrines are very beautiful, some are combined with the mosque; here are to be found thickly carpeted floors, wonderful glass chandeliers and wall coverings of exquisite rugs.

The principal or more famous temples are also often beautiful; usually they are placed close to a river, or have a pool fed by a clear spring of water overhung by shady trees and teeming with hundreds of sacred fish; nearby will be a stream where the worshippers may bathe. The temples are filled with the scent of flowers brought there and kept fresh by the water scattered over them; most of the idols stand within a trough, many have an earthenware jar resting on an iron stand over them, and from this, water is taken to keep the blossoms fresh, to continue throwing forth their divine scent. Within the temple there is gaiety, light and a heavenly aroma.

Within the mosque there is a sombreness, the air is heavy, the light is dim, except when all are assembled and the lamps are lit, then a solemnity rests over the building with the rows of men, standing with heads bowed and hands before them held out palm upwards, or kneeling with heads bent until they touch the ground, all moving together like soldiers on parade.

Much in the Muslim beliefs and recorded past is like that of the Christians. Many are the stories found in the Bible which are within the pages of the Koran, they vary one from the other but very little. The Muslim acknowledges that Jesus walked this earth, but will not admit that he was The Son of God. To them he was but a prophet like Abraham and Mohammed, and the greatest of all of them was Mohammed; he was the last.

Lawrence said that he had endeavoured to ascertain the religious ideas of the Hindu, but that he had come to the conclusion that religion existed only to a slight extent, and that in Kashmir its place was "Taken by an elaborate social code prescribing the conduct of daily life, the sanctions of which were social and not religious". To me it appeared just the same —a way of life.

Fifty years ago intelligent Kashmiri Hindus were complaining to him of the laxness entering their religion; in these days it is

much the same; the foster-mother of Hindu children frequently being a Muslim, the water carrier, although a Muslim, supplying water to the Hindu, food cooked on a Muslim boat being eaten by a Hindu, and so on.

Except in Jammu Province there are few Hindu Temples in the villages, and these, together with the mosques, are uncared for, unswept, both inside as well as out; the priests and mullahs are mostly uneducated fellows and as superstitious as the followers of the faith they are supposed to teach and lead.

It is only during periods of national calamity or trouble such as earthquakes, floods, outbreaks of cholera and such-like that the temples and mosques are remembered and repaired and for a time even decorated while the people flock to them with trembling lips and generous gifts, but when all the troubles have passed, their religious fervour fades with it. It is as though they feel that they have appeased a wrathful God, and having done so, need pay no more attention until the next time—although surely this is also true of the followers of most other faiths.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Births, Marriages and Deaths

UNLIKE those of the Christian religion, the customs and ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death in the Hindu and Muslim community of the Valley are quite elaborate, and although they now may not always be carried out entirely as demanded by an orthodox member of the faith, much is; superstitions maintained by fear of something ill resulting being responsible for this.

The ceremony of a Hindu birth is most elaborate, with mystic figures chalked on the floor, fire, pots and pestle being worshipped by a girl, presents to the priest and with shouting and rejoicing if a boy is born—this regardless of the ill effects upon the mother. Always a most careful note is made for the astrologer of the exact time of the birth. On the fourth day all the usual tasty sweetmeats are carefully prepared and sent round as gifts; the mother's parents send her special food. On the ninth day mother and child are bathed in some auspicious hour suggested by the priest, and the child is named. On the eleventh day the mother moves out into the courtyard or compound of the house for the first time, sitting down on the same mystic figure drawn on the ground, and showing the sunshine to the child. The house is swept, the bed remade, and they are no longer "unclean". The family Brahmin is called in, he performs a most curious ceremony in which the mother of the child has to take the five products of the cow, milk, butter, ghee, dung and urine, thus purifying herself. When this is finished the astrologers of the mother and the father cast the child's horoscope; this is most necessary for the time of his or her marriage.

When the child is a month old another feast is given, he then receives new clothes, which are supposed to be made by the

priest's wife who uses in their making a rose thorn as a needle. At the age of six months, he takes his first solid food consisting of boiled rice and milk; at that time his ears are pierced for ear-rings and food is distributed to the relatives. In the third year comes the ceremony of shaving the head, a happy occasion; the boy's hands and feet are dyed red, a feast is provided by the paternal aunt, for which she receives gifts of rice, salt and money; the boy's hair is buried under a tree. With a girl there is no shaving of the head. When of an age between seven and thirteen on a day fixed by the astrologer, the boy is given the sacred thread and becomes a true Brahmin. The people feast for five days before that date; the maternal uncle presents gifts the day preceding it. The ceremony is performed by the family priest who invokes the protection of the sixty-four deities. Friends and relations give the father gifts of money. It is on this day that the boy is confirmed as a Brahmin; among the many strange things that happen is that he is shown a virgin and a heifer seven times, after which the sacred thread of three strings is placed round his neck, mystic figures are traced on the ground round where he stands, the women sing, coins and shells are thrown over his head, and he is then carried in state down to the river where he performs his prayer ceremonies. Congratulations are offered, everyone gets food, and the priest receives money.

Although there is no reason why a pundit whose wife has been unable to give him a child should not take a second wife, this is not generally done among the middle-class people. Instead they will adopt a son, he may or may not come from those of the pundit's *gotra*—that is his tribal division, and the only restriction made is that the boy must not yet have been invested with the sacred thread. Such a son, if adopted before he is born, is treated as the eldest son, and adopted sons cannot be disinherited as can real sons. A son may also be adopted by a widow, since, in the old days before widows were permitted to remarry, it was only by this means that she could ensure for herself a roof over her head and a bite of food in her old age.

One of the most lovely old Hindu ladies I know in Srinagar has such a son. He must now be one of the wealthiest of pundits there, and he worships his "mother" who is at all times his first

consideration. As an unhappy child-widow she was sitting outside the back door of her father-in-law's house when the boy, then but a few days old, was dropped into her lap by a Hindu woman who, hiding her face, hurried on. By the time the girl had realized what had happened the woman had disappeared. She looked down at the child in her lap and after a while she too fled the house eventually to take a job as an ayah to an Englishwoman so that she might bring the child up. It was a long story of which both "mother" and "son" were very proud, one which rang the whole way through with their deep gratitude for a single Englishwoman who had seen to the education of the boy who, with his inborn astuteness, had been able to build up a progressive business and give to his "mother" a life, as she expressed it "of a Maharani, with all the luxuries and pleasures, but none of the ties!"

The wedding day, always an important day in the life of any man or woman the whole world over, is far more so to the Hindu of the Valley, for during that day the groom is referred to as the Maharaja, the bride as the Maharani, and the best man as the Pot Maharaja, and in the time of Pathan rule, he was likely to be called upon to undertake his duties, since it was not then uncommon for the groom, all decked up in his regalia, to be seized, and in that event the best man became the groom.

The marriage of Hindus is all arranged. In Kashmir this is usually undertaken by one of the professional match-makers, for there is not, as in India, the ever-available "matrimonial column" of the leading daily paper in which parents can advertise for a husband or wife for their adorable and domesticated, cultured daughter or handsome and intelligent son—always with the emphasis on the fair complexion of both, the beauty and sweet nature of the girl or the excellent health and physique of the boy.

When a likely bride has been found for the boy, the family astrologers are called in and the horoscopes of both boy and girl are compared. If these are found to be favourable, there may be arranged the amount of the dowry which is expected to come over with the girl. It is usual for the boy's mother to see the girl, for with the Hindu family system the son frequently remains in the home, bringing his wife into the family, and his

mother will have to put up with the new daughter-in-law. As a token of the agreement, the girl's parents send to the boy's parents a little salt, a little sugar and a few rupees. Besides the question of caste among the Hindus, there is also a certain amount of snobbishness, with newly rich traders' families endeavouring to marry their sons and daughters into those of the old aristocrats, for the latter, although they may have fallen into decay and near poverty, are very proud. This is where the match-maker is able to charge an unbelievably high fee for his services.

Again, the astrologers fix the day for the marriage; the houses of both families are swept and decorated, certain rites are performed, one known as *deogun*, from which dates the bride's formal initiation into Brahminism. On the day of all days, the groom, wearing rich clothes, dripping with jewels and decorated with heron feathers, starts off either on an ornamented, plumed horse or in a boat for his bride's house. Four Hindu attendants are supposed to accompany him, three with yaks' tails and the fourth with a silver cup and a shell, whilst strangely enough a Mussulman holds an ornamental umbrella over the groom's head. Decked out much the same as the groom is another boy—usually a near relative; he is the best man. As they near the bride's home the conch shells are blown, and a relation or an honoured guest of the bride comes down to meet the party. The actual ceremony is often complicated, varying slightly in different parts, the bride wearing the most lovely of fine clothes, her veiled face made up with painted decorations, and always with downcast eyes of modesty. Until the ceremony groom and bride will not have seen each other. If the hour set by the astrologer for the marriage is during the day, then after the marriage feast the guests escort both bride and groom to the house of the groom; if it falls during the night, then the party goes there in the morning. Immediately after the ceremony the bride's father adds three more strings to the groom's sacred thread. Returning to his home, the groom's entrance is barred by either his aunt, or his sister to whom he must pay some money. After one or two days in her husband's home the bride is taken back to her father's home; there she displays the jewels, clothes and other presents she has received,

after which she returns to the home of her husband—her father-in-law's house. Child marriage is no longer supposed to take place, but it is said that it does in some villages, although the marriage is not consummated until the bride is about thirteen years of age, after that she no longer keeps on her anklets and wears a headdress called a *taranga*—one sometimes also worn by girls who have reached a marriageable age though they still wear anklets.

Marriages are costly to both Muslim and Hindu fathers who will boast of the terrific amount spent on weddings in the family; often this is by way of explanation for their present poverty. If only the State would make a law that not more than a certain amount may be spent on a wedding, it would be secretly welcomed by those who have become impoverished by them, but as it is, the custom is there, and it is considered a disgrace not to lavish out money on feasting relatives and friends for days, and in giving masses of presents. The gifts from the father of the bride to his daughter are many, the bridegroom by custom receives from him gold ear-rings and gold armlets—in these days he frequently receives gold studs and rings in place of the latter. The bride receives from her father-in-law the *chandanhar*, which is a gold ornament worn round the neck. In addition to this she is given the *dij haru*, these being gold ear-ornaments of a mystic shape worn by her so long as her husband lives.

Because of the cost of the dowry and the wedding, the most terrible thing to wish a man is that he may be blessed with many daughters. This I once heard done at the border post on entering the State of Jammu and Kashmir, by a Scottish woman who knew her Kashmir well. Her victim was a Hindu Customs officer who had gone out of his way to be unpleasant to her and demanded excessive dues on the articles she was bringing into the country. But on hearing the blessing that she spat at him as she opened her purse, the poor man, white in the face suddenly discovered that he had made a mistake in his calculations, and requested but a fraction of the amount he had first demanded. Just as she was about to drive off in her car, he came up to the door, wished her a comfortable journey and then begged her to withdraw her "blessing". We afterwards heard

that the wretched man was then already blessed with six daughters and was hourly expecting to hear that his wife had given him another child!

Poor fathers who have been blessed with many daughters have cursed the day that they married, and been driven to drink or drugs at the realization of the amount they will have to borrow in order to pay the dowry and marriage feast for each; so that one hears of terrible happenings as a result of this custom. One such I heard of the sweeper in a European household the master of which had gone for many months to England. On his return, after a while he noticed that three of the sweeper's eight daughters he had seen grow up were not there. Then it was that his butler told him that while the sahib was away, the sweeper, who had taken to drinking in his worry over his daughters, had sold them one after the other into prostitution houses for three hundred rupees each.

This happened but a few years ago. Not many years prior to that time, had the daughters been possessed of good looks and shapely bodies, he could have sold them away as dancing girls for many times that amount; the Kashmiri dancing girl was famed throughout India for her good looks. In that event the girl did have a chance of becoming the concubine of a man of wealth, and being very powerful in his household if she produced for him his first son, although most of them finished their lives in the brothels, with the clear scented air of their motherland but a dim memory.

Death to the orthodox Hindu has no fears for he believes in reincarnation; there is but the sorrow at parting from his loved ones, and generally parents shower all their love on their children whom they seldom seem to scold when young, husband and wife in an arranged marriage being bound only by them. The dying man is placed on a straw bed of koin grass on a clean place on Mother Earth. Salt, rice and money are given on his behalf to the poor, and the *mantras* are recited without a break beside him. As he breathes his last he is lifted from the bed to the earth, then back on to the grass bed and a lamp is lighted at his head, whether it be day or night. There are ceremonies of washing, and wrapping in a sheet, then the body is carried on a board on the shoulders of four men—to

whom this task is considered a great honour, and they therefore change places frequently when the followers are many and the journey short on the way to the burning ghat. Sometimes the body is placed on a boat and taken on this down the river to the ghat, one mourner preceding the body, swinging a small pot of burning incense to clear the way, with those surrounding and following the corpse shouting to drive off evil spirits.

The funeral pyre is lighted by the son of the dead man. The cremation is performed by Mussulmans known as *kawji*, who in addition to receiving a fee in cash, are given half the shroud for their services and for providing the wood; the other half of the shroud is burned with the corpse. If the body is that of a woman, then a few ornaments are left on it, and these, when recovered from the fire, are also part of their fee. Those bones which are not consumed by the fire are, two days later, brought to the home and left in a hole in the wall until the day of Gang Ashtmi, when they are taken by the eldest son to the holy lake under the mountain Haramukh and cast in.

For ten days the house of the deceased is unclean and no one will eat food cooked there, and for the ten days that the soul of the dead man journeys to the other world, rites for the dead are performed by the river. The son of the dead man shaves his head and beard for those days of active mourning, and at the end of that time puts on new clothes given him by his father-in-law. Only then can he return home with the other mourners who form themselves into two lines outside his door so that he may pass into the house between them. On the eleventh day a service is performed for the dead person and for ancestors up to the seventh generation; only now can the family, which has for the ten days abstained from eating meat, partake of it. This same service is performed every fifteenth day for three months, after which it is repeated every month until the anniversary. During the whole of this time, the widows and women of the family mourn, for some months they do not change their clothes. During that time they doubtless pray for a marriage to which they may be bidden, for in that event they may again wear clean clothes and once more place round their necks the thread which was put on at marriage.

The Muslim baby first sees the light of day in the home of

his mother's family, she having gone there about two months before his expected arrival. A "wise woman" attends as the midwife, and after the child is born the priest comes in and taking the child by the right ear whispers into it the word *Azan*, so welcoming the child into the new world and faith; he then repeats into the left ear the Takbir, adding the warning that death is the end of all things. The mother fasts for two days, then has a meal of wheaten bread and eggs. On the seventh day, known as *sundar* day, the mother bathes and the child is named by the Pir of the family. The name he suggests usually has some connection with the month, for instance it may be that it is the anniversary of the death of a great saint—the boy will receive that name, maybe he was born in the month of Ramzan—that will be his name. And on that day the barber will be called to shave the child's head; this is the occasion of a great feast. Two, perhaps three months, will elapse before the mother returns to the home of her father-in-law with the child and bringing with her presents, among which should be a cow with a calf, or a pony with a foal, but in these days he is fortunate if she brings back a goat with a kid. Then at the age of four or five the boy is circumcised. Then is the occasion for a feast and presents. Friends and relatives are invited, the boy's feet and hands are stained with red *mendhi* dye, and he wears the most royal of clothing. For the seven days before the ceremony there is singing and feasting; on the day he is placed on a basket in which is a cock; this is the perquisite of the barber who is called in to perform the circumcision. Then, the boy by this time usually howling loudly, all the relatives and friends kiss his hand and give him presents of money, after which they carry him off to a shrine, and return to the house of his father for the feast.

The betrothal and marriage of the Muslim is a most complicated affair. If, when the boy has reached the years of puberty a marriage with a near relative cannot be arranged, a go-between is called in. He is not necessarily one who undertakes this as an occupation, but is one who is known for his powers of persuasion. He visits the homes of families with marriageable daughters, tells them highly coloured stories of the wealth, good looks, high birth and connections of his client, and suggests a marriage. From that time the selected girl is no

longer allowed to go out of her house or compound. The go-between arranges an informal meeting of both the fathers, at which is settled the day for the betrothals. Shortly after this the father of the boy, accompanied by a small party of relatives, carries to the girl's house some presents, usually consisting of silver bracelets, salt, sugar and cash, and the party is entertained by the girl's father. After the feast the betrothals are announced to the party, the priest, who is always present, asks a blessing, and records the intention of a marriage. The party remains the night and the following morning the boy's father receives from the girl's father, a blanket or a turban, together with half the gift of cash, sugar and salt he had brought with him, with these he returns home. On the four chief Kashmir Muslim holidays, the boy's father sends presents to the girl. For six months visits take place, and after this the marriage date is fixed, with the *Langan Chir* of from Rs. 20 to Rs. 50 being given to the girl's father by the boy's father. For a week before the marriage the girl sits inside her father's house with her hair down, whilst at both her house and that of the boy the singing and drumming goes on for all the days and nights—calling the guests. The day before the marriage, the boy's father sends some *mendhi* dye to the future bride's house; with this she stains her hands and feet. On the day of the marriage, the bridegroom after taking a bath, is dressed up in all his finery and all the jewels the family can produce or borrow, and his relatives come and give him presents. Together with his party he sets off, either walking, riding or by boat; first he visits a nearby shrine, there to say his prayers, then he goes to the graves of his father—if he is dead—and his grandfather; following that he makes for the bride's house, sending ahead of him the presents and the palanquin in which she will return. As they come close on her home, the women of her party come out, and standing in a half circle facing the men sing songs of welcome, telling the girl inside how handsome is her groom. Then, on his reaching the door, the village barber pours out a jar of water, and into this the groom's representative tosses a silver rupee, a custom known as *adbul* and one repeated when the groom takes his bride away. With the whole party assembled, the groom sits on the cushions like a Maharaja and a feast commences, and not

until the guests can eat no more do they start the marriage proper. This commences by the two fathers quarrelling over the *mehr* or dower to be fixed, it is just a form and part of the proceedings; next the headman of the village demands his fees, with him the father quarrels; he is followed by the bearers, and most other servants making their demands. Finally the marriage contract is completed by the Kazi, and he receives his fee without a quibble. Whilst this has been going on the bride and her friends have been examining the presents, and, wearing the best dress she has in her trousseau, she is carried either by her brother or if she has none or he happens to be too young, her maternal uncle, to the palanquin, inside which is a sheep's heart and some salt. In this, accompanied by the bridegroom, her brother and a female relative who will instruct the young virgin girl in the formalities which have later to be observed, she is carried to the bridegroom's house, but on the way the women of the village will come out and demand to see the bride. On reaching the house, she is carried from her palanquin to a room which has been prepared for her; there she sits with downcast head until her mother-in-law comes and raises her face, at the same time taking from the bride's handkerchief some money which is her perquisite and known as *hash kant*. Next all the women of her groom's family come and kiss the bride's hand, placing silver rupees in it. Seldom have bride or groom seen each other before marriage. A great feast is given on the marriage night, it goes on throughout the hours of darkness, so large that usually a contractor comes with all his gigantic pots and pans to prepare and serve it, and not until the next day to the guests depart.

The bride remains seven days in her husband's house, then putting on clothes given her by her father-in-law, she returns to her own father's house. She may be accompanied to it by her husband, but there he leaves her, and may not again visit her until he is invited by his father-in-law. It may be many months before he and his friends are bidden to return for his bride, then another feast is given, he remains there for three days, and departs with his wife and a present of clothes from his father-in-law: after this husband and wife live together.

There is little doubt that until not many years ago, in the

villages, consummation of the marriage took place and cohabitation used to commence when the girl was as young as ten years of age—rather a horrifying thought when the husband was not a boy but a middle-aged man, for a Muslim may have four wives; she is now often but twelve years of age when she first starts to have regular intercourse with her husband, to become a mother by the time that she is fourteen. The girls of those parts mature and age early: at thirty they are middle-aged and can easily be grandmothers, so that it is not unusual for mother and daughter to go on producing babies side by side for some years with uncles and aunts years younger than nephews and nieces, whilst in one case I heard of a grandmother who was competing with an increase in her own family—so often have I been utterly confused by these family complications.

Now we strike another strange custom of the Valley. The Hindu may adopt a son; the Muslim, if it seems as though there will be no possibility of finding a husband for his daughter—and strangely enough Muslim fathers are usually very attached to their daughters—may, when the girl is but a child, take into his house a boy of a family which has been blessed with more sons than money; this boy is known as a *Khana damad*. He is the intended husband for the daughter, and he will work as a labourer for his future father-in-law for something like seven years before he marries the daughter of the house. Oddly enough there is no legal obligation on the part of either man or boy, there is a moral one only, that at the end of the time he can have his bride. The advantage seems to be all on the side of the father-in-law, in that during those years he has the services of a labourer free, the expenses of his daughter's marriage are small, and he keeps his daughter in the house. In the latter years especially though, it has been the custom for a deed of gift to be executed by the man in favour of the boy, and in the event of the boy leaving his house, then the property which is contained in that deed remains with the boy. But this does not frequently happen and generally future father-in-law and son get on well together whilst the *Khana damad* assumes the Kram—a kind of surname—of his father-in-law. During the cursed beggar system which prevailed in the Sikh times, it was always the poor wretched *Khana damad* who was handed over for service

on the road to Gilgit; if he died on the way, the son of the house had escaped that death, so that the *khana damadi* system was then most popular.

I recently came across a rather pretty story of a beautiful girl who fell deeply in love with the *Khana damad* who was intended as her husband. Her twin brother warned her that their widower father, a successful and proud farmer, intended, after some six years, to break his contract with the father of the boy, and after turning him out on some trumped up charge, marry her off to a most influential old man of the village. Together, brother and sister conceived a scheme to outwit the father; its success rested entirely on what affection father had for daughter. At night, with her brother in her room, she opened the door to the *Khana damad* and when both were seated together the brother called loudly to his father, who, when he came, was shown by him how he had found the lovers. In the old days, the father would have slain the boy and might also have killed his daughter, but she, by pleading with him, and the son, when his father's temper had subsided, by pointing out the shame he could bring on the family by exposing it, brought the old man to his senses, and the young couple were married shortly afterwards. The story does not finish in true story-book fashion though, for they were childless after being married for nearly twenty years when, from the brother who was also childless, I heard of the affair. Yet, by his will the old man had divided his property equally between son and son-in-law.

Death to the Muslim, though he believes in a hereafter, is not such a happy occasion as it is to the Hindu, who knows that he will return on earth. When his end is near, laid with his head towards the north or east, the Muslim is given his last drink which consists of a *sharbat* made of honey—a Muslim may not take any intoxicating liquor. His family stand round him, and as he breathes his last they call on the name of God and break into wailing and weeping. The washed body is wrapped in a cloth and carried in a *tabut*—a coffin-like box which is kept always in readiness at the mosque—to the graveyard, where the relatives and friends repeat the words of the funeral service. Over the box is flung a cotton pall—the perquisite of the grave-digger and the priest. The body is removed from the box and

buried in the cotton cloth. On that day, and for the following three days, the priest and the guests are fed at the home of some relative, since no food may be eaten in the house of the deceased, but on the fourth day which is known as *chäudas*, a great feast is given there. And on the Friday following the death, all return to the graveyard, where as they stand by the mound, a relative flings a coloured cloth over the shoulders of the dead man's heir. For forty days prayers are offered for the soul of the deceased, with food being given both to the priest and to the poor while for one year, gifts must be given each month to the priest, after which, on the anniversary of the death, the priest must receive a gift.

The graveyards of the Muslim, with their limestone slabs sparkling in the sunshine, can be very beautiful, especially in the spring when the mauve and the white iris planted there are in flower, and also later when the shady sacred trees are in leaf. Always close to the village, often on a hill, they seem to overlook it, but there is nothing eerie or morbid about their appearance, no hushed voices as people pass them; those that rest there may hear the happy voices of the small boys and girls as they drive their father's sheep or goats from among the gravestones, the clump of hooves as the tongas or bullock carts go past on the nearby road, or the splash of paddles as they are dipped into the quiet moving waters of the Jhelum or one of the lovely still lakes.

Almost every village has its mosque and attendants, the larger ones boasting their own mullah, the smaller ones having one attending many of them and riding round to each to preach every Friday and holy day as well as attending at births, marriages and deaths. The living is usually held by one family, being passed down from father to son.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Cultural Arts of Kashmir

So far it has been described how the people work, and how they pray, but only in the northern States, how they play. The fact is that the Kashmiri of the Valley is not one who plays very much. Go into any of their villages during the day and you will find it practically empty; the men are in the fields, and at certain times of the year their womenfolk and children are there also; only the very old people remain at home. Go there in the evening and you will find the women working and the men sitting round and talking; the children may be playing, their games usually being tip-cat, a game which is played with sticks and a piece of wood which is shaped like an elongated egg, one end of which the boy taps when it is resting on the ground so that it jumps up into the air to be hit as far as possible in a certain direction. Some play an odd game of marbles with round pebbles, and the girls may play a kind of hop-scotch on squares scratched on the ground; that is when they are not mothering the baby brother or sister, one of which seems always to be around. But the women do not play; few of them have time for it, being fully occupied with child bearing and so much work to do. The men? they are either tired or else lazy after the day's work and they sit around and talk and smoke. In the winter they work hard at their looms, busy at their labours deep into the night, for winter does not mean that they may hibernate with the coming of the snows.

At festival and fair times they play, or rather watch others play, just as they do at weddings, with the guests sitting round and gorging themselves until they can barely move, then listening happily to the bards. And Kashmiri Muslims have most enormous appetites, eating about three times that which any

Indian or Pakistani will consume; it is fantastic the amount that can be eaten at one of their feasts. The pundit eats far less; the Muslim says that this is because he is so mean, that he does not know how to enjoy life.

Of the players who entertain with music, a lot could have been said in the past; now they come round in little bands at harvest time, just before the winter sets in, to cheer the people up and, if the crop has been good, to collect a few annas. Most of the bands come from the tidy little mud-hutted village of Vathore which is some twelve miles to the south-east of Srinagar and set amongst mulberry groves and rice fields which are fed their water by a babbling, winding mountain stream.

Into this little village with less than two hundred inhabitants who are known as *bhands*, has shrunken the glorious centuries-old traditions of the dance, drama and music of Kashmir. Now they are poor strolling musicians, almost equal to beggars, who pass from one village to another in small bands usually consisting of two drummers, two shahnai players, a jester or clown and two boys with hair grown long and dressed as girls, they being the dancers and singers.

The ancestors of these people had sat at the feet of Kings, had entertained Emperors and Empresses, had received at their hands cloaks of honour and costly presents, whilst their ears rang with the applause of the members of the Court or those it had pleased the ruler to invite to his fabulous parties; their costumes were costly and beautiful while many were given an allowance by the King. Now the gowns worn by the boys and those of the others are usually the rags of what were once beautiful, although there are still a very few bands which manage to adorn themselves in raiment which has just a reminder, an echo, of the past; this is kept for the parties of the wealthier folk, the fastidious ones, or those who feel that they can do themselves little more harm by getting further into debt over their daughter's wedding. A few of the better-known *bhands* are to be heard nightly over the radio from the capital; the mellow tones of their many instruments, which are peculiar to Kashmir, blending with the chorus of the players' voices, for mostly they sing together, seldom is there a solo.

With the strolling bards it is the high-pitched voices of boys

that are heard as they dance, usually twirling round and round, and "act", or standing make exaggerated feminine movements with their arms, the whole time tossing back their waist-long hair and smiling. When the audience looks as though it will appreciate the vulgar lyrics which have now replaced some of those long known, they start to sing and sometimes act them. At other times the artistes are paid to improvise some gibe set at a villager whose own people, maybe those he employs, fear themselves to tell him the truth.

Some of these boys continue to play to the full the female role all through their lives. One impersonator with a falsetto voice, I quite imagined to be a rather attractive girl as backed by an orchestra of one drum, a shahnai and a rabab, she started a kind of shimmy-shuffle dance on the river bank by the side of our houseboat. After a while, with the arrival of quite a large audience of boatmen who stood behind the musicians watching my reactions as much as the dancer, the girl's movements speeded up the tempo, and she started twirling round and round, high kicking in a kind of Can-Can as she faced her orchestra; but why not when in my direction? The boatmen were by then shrieking with laughter, the reason for which I just could not understand, for neither the girl nor the musicians were singing. Then the old manji, who had come to stand just behind me quietly observed, "You see, sahib, not even these eunuch men can dance like a girl!"

Writing of them sixty years ago Lawrence even then said, "The minstrels of Kashmir can be recognised by their long black hair and stroller mien, and although they are practically a peculiar people so far as marriage goes, they sometimes recruit their companies by enlisting a villager."

At other times I have sat in my boat and listened to the music of the orchestra which had for nearly an hour before been broadcasting from the little studio over the other side of The Bund. With their music modulated to the houseboat's lounge, they sat cross-legged on the carpet, four of them, each a master of the instrument he had chosen to play, one with two tabla—drums which rest face up on the ground, the tone of the skin being controlled by straps which run from face to base and are tightened by wood blocks; another with the sitar—the long-

necked mandoline-like instrument with many strings, but on only one of which the player flicks; then the saz—a cross between a banjo and a violin, looking rather like an old-fashioned hall barometer and played with a bow; finally, that instrument which is Kashmir's most delightful piece, the santoor, a word which means one hundred strings, although in fact it has ninety-six, which are in batches of eight, each one of which are the same tone. These strings, which have a range of but an octave and a half, are stretched over a hollow base of mulberry wood and played rather like a xylophone with two little sticks which have curved ends, the quality of tone being rather like the harpsichord, but with more body, since eight strings vibrate each note.

They had brought with them other instruments, the rabab, another bow-played string which I had seen played by the strolling bards; this they said was of Persian origin, the strings are of gut; then there was what looked like an ordinary earthenware water pitcher—the ghata.

The music they produced was delightful and fascinating. There is a distinct difference between the classical and the folk music, and it was surprising how very often the human voice is made to become a part of the orchestra. But those masters of the art, in comparison with even the meanest of members of a tea-shop orchestra in Europe or America, were very poorly paid. Yet they were proud, and great was their knowledge of the history of their art in Kashmir; it was a heritage which they were delighted to be asked to tell me, and although I have never been greatly interested in music, they told their stories so well that they were full of fascination.

At first I was taken back almost to the period when legend was history, to two hundred years before Christ, when, they assured me, books tell of the great patron of music the Maharaja Jalok, who had at his court hundreds of musicians. Then to the time of Lalitaditya, at whose court was Indra Prabha, the most celebrated dancer of her time. About a thousand years ago, with their coming, the Muslims had brought with them their own style which blended with the music then known in the land. Great masters were born, their names have passed down through the years, men like Amir Khusrav and Mirza Tan Sain,

who invented not only styles, rags and tals, but also first made and introduced some of the instruments so popular in Kashmir to this day.

Blockmann, writing in 1875, said that, according to Abu'l Fazl, schools of music were founded in Kashmir by Irani and Turani, musicians who were under the patronage of the Sultan Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din, the patron of so many of the arts introduced into the country at that time, and that they brought in a least twenty-three songs or pieces each of which he names. It is accepted that Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din, was a great music lover, that he was always most generous with regard to allowances paid to his musicians, with the result that many *sazindas*, players, and *guindas*, chanters, "flocked to Kashmir from Arabia, Iran, Tashkhand, Samarkhand, Kabul, and Delhi". In those days the ud and the lute were the most favoured of the instruments used in the court. Of the "poet musicians there was Mulla Jamil, proud, handsome, a great expert and also composer of vocal music, being possessed of a beautiful voice, as high as the mountains, as deep as the lake, as clear as the spring stream, and as soft and smooth as the waters of the Dal". The Sultan was himself said to be "a great classical singer", in all probability he was, but in those days so many writers flattered their patron king that there is the possibility that this was an exaggeration; in any event he had sufficient interest to encourage those whose art it was, holding each year a great festival of music to which came instrumentalists and singers from all countries near and far.

These fine present-day Kashmiri musicians as they sat on the carpet in my houseboat advised me to search out books in the Club Library which were written by Dutt way back between 1879 and 1898 and were English translations of the *Rajatarangini*, his books being published under the title of, *The Kings of Kashmir*. I did not find them there, I could not find a copy in all India, but I did discover one in Oxford, and in them found the original author wrote that "a young woman, prolific in music, possessed of a sweet voice, genuine ardour for song, graced the palace. The songstress Utsava was even like Cupid's arrow, charming the eye and prolific in dance, both swift and slow, she entranced everyone"; writing that "the actresses who displayed the forty-nine different emotions seemed even like

the ascending and descending notes of music personified. Their song was like the cuckoo". Why not liken it to the lark? you may ask; from those old songs I have heard I would also describe it as such, the notes being separated one from the other for there is no smooth movement between them.

Sultan Haidar Shah, who followed Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din, was equally musical, he is reputed to have "had twelve hundred musicians from Hindustan in his court" and was "himself so skilled in the art of playing the lute that he gave lessons even to the professors".

The parties which he gave must have been most exciting, with the music working the court and visitors up to a terrific state of ecstasy, for we read that "the spectators seemed to view Indra—the Lord of the gods—himself in the King. The poets and pundits beside the King were like demi-gods. His servants like the attendant gods. And the yogis around him were like holy men who had obtained salvation. The actresses were like apsaras—fairies—whose charms were heightened by their emotions. The singers were the Gandharvas—Indra's musicians—and the stage was just heaven itself", and as for the setting of this dance and musical evening; "The stage was like a garden where the lamps on it looked like rows of Champaka flowers, and around them were men intoxicated with wine, like bees around flowers. Rows of lamps surrounded the King, as if gods, pleased with his government had come to witness the dance, and had thrown a garland of golden lotuses round him. In some places the rows of lamps were reflected on the water, as if Varuna—Regent of the Ocean—had out of favour towards the King illuminated the court with lights from the Naga world. The lines of lamps shone like jewels on the heads of the Nagas who had come to witness the dance. Those who were at a distance doubted if the lights were really lamps, or the spirits of former kings assembled to view the present sovereign, or stars and the moon descended from the sky to attend on the King, or the spirits of holy men who had attained emancipation, or if they were the great gods assembled there in their grace and beauty."

There is little doubt that the audience were completely entranced, though mention of wine causes one to wonder if the

author of this was not himself carried away into this other world of imagination. In those days the king showered gold on those dancers and musicians who pleased him.

The musicians of the Valley claim that Carangadeva, the author of the *Sangita-ratnakara*, was a Kashmiri, since his grandfather had been born there, moving to the Deccan to become secretary to the Yadava king. This work, written in Sanskrit, is claimed as the only authoritative work on music in the early thirteenth century which explains in its seven sections, not only the theory and technical details of Indian music, but describes the instruments, together with the composition of music for voice and instruments, and music which should accompany the dancer.

With the coming of Akbar and the Moghul Emperors the music of Kashmir continued to be looked upon with royal favour, but the Emperors were seldom there to foster it as they doubtless would have done, for it is said of Akbar that he had an immense love for music. The great musicians left Kashmir and went down to the Punjab and to the Court in Delhi where they could be appreciated and still receive encouragement. There the genius Miyan Tan Sain, called by some writers "The Orpheus of India", had embraced Islam and had been given the title of Mirza to add to his new name of Atta Husain. This great exponent was bringing Indian music to the fore once again, not only developing it, but enlarging it to a greater state than had ever been known. So great was he that he could gladly suffer a gentle reproof, for it is said that whilst at the court of Akbar, Yusaf Shah of Kashmir, to the horror of many present, on some minor point corrected the great singer, who immediately bowed his acknowledgement. To him it was proof that some at least of the great ones invited by the Emperor to listen to him, were paying attention, and were able to appreciate the delicate beauty of the art he was endeavouring to rebuild.

But those fine artists of the craft who had chosen to remain in the Valley, as they realized that man must work to eat, gradually took to wandering from one village to another with music and songs, and it is from these people that the *bhands* of Vathore claim to be descended. From these have again risen the finer musicians who have been singled out to broadcast and record

the dozens of songs which are still remembered throughout the lovely land. These men are but a shadow of those who were so glorious in Kashmir's past musical history, but they are the living proof that music is as inbred in those peoples, as are the other arts to which they so tenaciously cling, though in so doing they may remain poor of worldly goods.

The Kashmiri classical music is known as *Soofiana Kalam*. The word Soofiana, if coming from Soofism or Sophism, means mystical; Kalam means poetry, so that the translation of the complete name is Mystical Poetry. In it one finds traces of the Persian, for the words or lyrics are usually in that language, occasionally they may be in Kashmiri, whilst most definitely the style of music is towards the Persian, and the result of a combined orchestra in which are both Indian and Persian types of instruments, is that the latter overshadows the Indian.

Also, most of all the Kashmiri musicians are Muslims; the pundits were theorists and did not sing, but chanted the mantras and the shlokas in a dull monotone.

The wandering bands of musicians and entertainers have gradually reduced in numbers. There was a time, in the days of the Sultan Shah Mir, who ruled in 1335, in which two of his scholar-ministers wrote in Sanskrit the books *Samaimatrika* and *Kutnimahatam*, dealing with Kashmiri music and drama, when every village had its stage, and the men and also the women delighted in taking part in the dances, drama and singing.

Even just over fifty years ago Lawrence was writing at some length about these wandering entertainers for whom he had a soft spot. He declared that the very best of the companies—the Bhaggats of Syebug—died off in the great famine of 1877. In their acting, he said, "they portray village life in a most vivid manner. Their dresses and make-up are excellent, and they represent most faithfully the internal working of a village community. It is said that Maharaja Gulab Sing acquired a very intimate knowledge of village administration from the Bhaggats' performances, and I have picked up some hints from them as to the methods of the village accountant." Lawrence's great achievement for Kashmir was Land Reform, so that his last observation is interesting.

In those days the plot was always much the same, with the

great Raja riding into the village, his only thought to redress the wrongs his people had suffered, his Vizir seizing both the village accountant and the lambardar, and calling for their books. Then came the villager who, believing he was to receive justice, rushed before the Raja with his grievance. After exhausting himself, he watched the Vizir and accountant or lambardar—whichever one he had complained against—in whispered conversation with the kindly Raja and the next scene was the poor wretched complainant being seized and severely flogged for having brought a trumped-up charge. But the charge he made on the stage, was that which the people were dying to make against their own officials but dare not; that was where the subtleness of the attack lay, that is why few accountants or lambardars attended these performances, and really feared the players when an official of importance was visiting the village at the same time as the Bhaggats. There is little doubt that threats even bribes were offered, but the players were of the people and with the people, and all those to whom I talked about them, agree that they were fearless and merciless in their portrayals of the wrongs and persecutions that were being committed against the peasants. Since even the official, if he were inclined to turn a blind eye to what was being forced before him, never knew if the Maharaja would see their play into which he, the official, might have by then been introduced, he had to take notice of it.

The orchestra travelling with the band in those days consisted "of four fiddles with a drum in the centre, or of clarionets and drums, but the company often contained twenty persons or more. The wardrobe was frequently of great value, and several companies which I have met are said to have dresses and properties worth more than Rs. 2000. Their acting is excellent and their songs are often very pretty."

How different is the story now; a pathetic little band of near beggars with a wardrobe ready for the rag-bag, probably the patched up remnants of what Lawrence once saw; but they still remain happy folk, full of natural mirth; they still sing, they still dance, and they still act, although they have deteriorated in quality of performance with the fading and ageing of their dresses. Even though, it seems that there are some among them

with possibilities as actors: this I was assured of by an Indian film producer who came to my houseboat to witness—on the roof since the artistes were rather unpleasantly odoriferous—a play they performed for us. I found it difficult to believe, but must not judge—it would not be right for me to do so, although I tremble to imagine their reception on a Western stage.

The better class of orchestra and its members, either working together or as individual artistes, would I believe be accepted there, providing they changed the types of songs from one to another, and when necessary put into their playing the *vive* that I have seen them muster up after the first two or three items at a party.

The most popular and best-known tune in all Kashmir is the *Chakri*. In the villages this is accompanied by folk instruments like the home-made ghata and the tumbaknani and a miniature sarangi. It is always sung in chorus, not unusually with a little dancing, for it tells of happy times, of the wondrous beauties of Kashmir, of love and of the spring. It is the song of the poorer peoples, even though it sings of their joys and their hopes for the future.

The *Soofiana Kalam* is for the men and women of wealth, it is not known in the villages, other than the few which have radio sets through which it has been introduced to them, and is not appreciated by the peasants who think of it as the average European or American does of "Chamber music".

Being one of the great seats of learning in the East, men came from other countries to seek knowledge there, and in doing so frequently brought knowledge with them. They found Kashmir well to the fore in fostering the cultural arts of that early age. The pity of it is that much of the literature was destroyed as each dynasty came to power and did its best to obliterate that which its predecessor had created. At the time none of them realized that so much would ultimately be to the good and glorification of them all, whether Hindu or Muslim in that land. Still some remains though, and within that which does, there are records which are acknowledged and accepted as having been taken from the past writings. Of the poets, their original written words may have been burned, but the beauty of their poems is

imprinted for all time on the lips of the men and women of Kashmir; they will never die, neither they nor the lyrics which so perfectly fit the tunes still sung not only in the Valley, but in the hills and away over the mountains in those parts which are separated by their height, but to which they have access through the steep and narrow passes and along the rushing, winding rivers.

Those who have undertaken the research of the literary past of the country have been unable to gather together a completely connected story of the Buddhist and the Hindu periods of which much was a sort of overflow or a part of the literary history and records of the then India, but fortunately there is the one great work, *Rajatarangini*—"The River of Kings"—which contains the most valuable historical records of that period. Its author was Kalhana, and he started compiling this history of Kashmir in A.D. 1148. He was born into a Brahmin family, and his father was the minister of King Harsha who ruled between A.D. 1089 and 1101. The book consists considerably of the collected chronicles of past writers from among which he had absorbed most valuable information; they came from the pen of one Helaraja of the eighth century, Ratnakara of the ninth century and Kashemendra of the tenth century; these men all writing before A.D. 1066, a date famous in the history of England.

During the period of the Muslim rule the Sultans opened up colleges in many places, and during the time of the Sultan Qutb-ul-Din, who ruled from 1373 to 1389 A.D., the first residential college was opened. But it was not until the reign of that great King Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din, who ruled for over fifty years from A.D. 1420, that the records that Kalhana had commenced, were brought up to date.

The King had established a university close to his palace; in this was a translation section from which came many Persian and Kashmiri scripts which had originally been in the Arabic and Sanskrit. A library was collected together from distant countries; it is said that it was the finest to be found in the Islamic East. During that time the *Rajatarangini* was brought up to date by the writer Jona Raja—a Hindu who wrote in Sanskrit and was a great favourite with this Muslim Sultan. Mulla Ahamad, a Muslim who wrote in Persian, contributed *Bahr-ul-Asmar*—

"The Sea of Tales"—to that age of learning. It is recorded that the King was himself a writer, his first book being a technical one, oddly, on the subject of fireworks; the second, a poem, was written when he was ageing: both were in Persian. It would appear that during the lifetime of this religiously tolerant monarch, Hindu and Muslim men of learning worked happily side by side; it mattered not whether they wrote in Persian or Sanskrit, so long as they wrote or translated, and there can have been few books or manuscripts which could not be found in more than one language in that library. During that reign there were also many other literary works, one by the national saint Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, another by Yuddhabhatta and still others, most of which were biographies of, or episodes in the life of the King or Sultan as he is referred to.

The task of keeping the chronicles of the country up to date was then taken over by Shivara, a Sanskrit scholar, who brought it up to the accession of Fateh Shar in A.D. 1484. He was followed by one whose work, *Rajavalipataka*, carried it on until the country was conquered by Akbar. In Akbar's time a Brahmin, Prajya Bhatt, accepted the task; his works were completed in 1594 and were carried forward by others, among them being Haider Malik in the seventeenth century, Mohammed Azam in the eighteenth century and Birbal Kachru in the ninteenth century, and so on right up until modern times. It would seem that these works of the chroniclers escaped destruction; in all probability being kept hidden in the Royal Palace unknown to the rulers, who one after the other had the works of the earlier periods either burned, or dumped in the Dal Lake.

The records which have remained, when made by more than one writer over a period, do not always agree as to dates or even names, although possibly errors have been made in the translations, and in arriving at the dates mistakes have occurred in working them out from the quoted Hindu or Muslim years.

Of the poets of Kashmir there have been many; in the present times, as always, there is one who is looked upon much like a Poet Laureate of the country. Again quoting Lawrence, he refers to, "the village poets who suddenly spring up in the midst of business and recite in a loud shrill tone the praises of the most influential person present." This must have been most dis-

concerting to the "influential person", but in all probability the poet had considerable method in his presentation of a poem at that particular moment, being thus able to distract attention for sufficient time to permit the "influential person" to reconsider the case and reverse his decision, for one never knows with a Kashmiri. Lawrence goes on to say that he knew "many of these poets, and have spent hours listening patiently to rhymes which seemed to have no end, and which jumbled up in a very curious manner oriental tropes with the most commonplace and technical terms of survey and revenue work", and he explains that many of these poets that he met were unfortunately not quite sane; one he knew was a hopeless drunkard.

But apart from these, and there must have been many of them in the old days when poems and lyrics were recited with a musical background or sung as ballads before the King and his court, there were those who stand out in the history of Kashmir and whose memory is revered as their poems are recited, chanted or sung there to this day. They are the Shakespears, the Burns and the Shelleys of the Vale; strangely enough there were several poetesses among them, and as always they have not come from one class, for there are the delightfully lovely thoughts spoken in words by Kings and Queens, by beggars and by those who were near insane and would most certainly be "put away" in these days. Neither were they confined to any particular religion, for both Muslims and Hindus have contributed, not forgetting at least one Christian woman—Mrs. Percy-Brown—odd verses of whose gems it is still fashionable for Kashmiri writers to quote before a chapter in a guide book on the Valley, whether it be small or large. She though was a poetess of modern times.

These poets come up right through the ages, in many of their lines are to be found the history and the emotions, as expressed, of their environments at a particular stage in the progress of Kashmir. There are stories of love, stories of their heroes, and many tales of the legendary age. Then there are poems for each of the seasons, for the sowings, the reapings, for the time when the saffron is collected, for weddings and so on. Within them they have worked many of the old popular Persian legends, this in spite of the writers, having been Hindus. There are very many

love songs; those which remind the people of the beauties of the country in which they live, and although no doubt some of the sweetness of the originals has been lost in the translation, those who undertook that task have chosen their words well; they also must have been poets, for so much of the loveliness of the originals remains.

As far as it is possible to trace, the first pure Kashmiri poet was Citi Kantha who lived in the early thirteenth century. Of him little can be traced, except that he wrote several books and translated many more from the Arabic into Sanskrit; probably he was under the patronage of Hasan Shah, for "he speaks well of his liberal and wise rule".

Following him was a poetess remembered by all Kashmiris. Although named Laleshwari, she was also known as Lalla Arifa or Lal Ded. Both Muslims and Hindus claim her as their own and each revere her memory. Of recent years some of her compositions have been collected together and published, but although most among them are very beautiful, not all are easy to appreciate. It would appear that the translations were difficult to make, for even learned Kashmiris admit that in the originals they find it hard to follow the rhythm and metre. The only suggestion that they can put forward for this is that the words have changed in that a syllable may have since been added or dropped here and there, or the accent lengthened or shortened, as for instance has happened to many English words when spoken by an American.

Laleshwari was born in A.D. 1335 into a fairly wealthy family which lived in Pandrethan, the capital in Asoka's time, and some four miles to the south-east of the present Srinagar. Of her early days little is known, except those bits contained in a few fables of the Valley. She was married in Pampar into a Brahmin household, and it is said that her husband was not kind to her, whilst her step-mother-in-law treated her cruelly and all but starved the girl; one writer tells that the older woman used to serve her a stone covered with a thin layer of rice in order to make it appear a lot. In the mother-in-law's defence it must be said that the girl was strangely odd in her ways; some have maintained that she was born a mystic and that it was wrong of her parents to have married her off, since both her husband and

her mother-in-law had every right to expect her to behave in the manner conforming to the social practices of a family. To those of that household into which she had come to live, she must have appeared more than strange, driving her mother-in-law, who could not understand her, nearly to distraction, and whilst it is well for those who admire her later poetic writings to defend her, the life she led a little later on, as described by those of her day, was nearer that of a mad woman than a fanatic.

Eventually she left her husband's home, but not to return to that of her parents; instead she wandered from one village to another singing and dancing in rags which left her half-nude, at times completely nude. According to Muslim tradition, when remonstrated with for her lack of decency, she replied that only those who feared God were men, and of those there were few. Then one day as she roamed naked at Khanpor, she saw Shah Hamadan in the distance, and fled crying out, "I have at last seen a man"; after that she always wore clothes.

It is said that she fell under the influence of Sidh-Bey, the Shaivite saint, soon to become his spiritual preceptor and a follower of the Trika Philosophy, after which her mind turned towards mysticism.

In her poems she tells how one may so discipline the body that the spirit may leave it to pass for a while into the higher planes; she talks of the Chakras, those points of energy within the human body. To her all religions were as one, as was the oneness of God and the equality and brotherhood of man. She condemned idol worship and rituals; she talked of the love of man and the purity which he must attain. Her poems, expressed in song and verse, were like sermons to the common people to whom in those days she was just a dancing ascetic; they loved to sit around and listen to her teachings, spoken with a silver voice and versed in the most beautiful words of their own mother-tongue. She talked to them in a language they understood, bringing into her verses examples of their everyday life, of the people, and of the things they knew and lived amongst. Therein lay her greatness, for her poems, although appreciated by kings and members of their courts, together with the learned men of that age, were also a message for all, and to this very day the people of the Valley sing the songs of Lalla.

present workers are untrained in schools of painting; they have it in their blood to paint; such artistic perfection could not of a sudden have descended upon them.

There is slight evidence of their living though. Jarrett in his translation in 1894 of *Ain-i-Akbari*, refers to the great Chinese artist Mani on his journey first through India, then on to Iran—where he was flayed alive by the then King Shahpur for claiming to be a prophet, "remaining in Kashmir for a time". Abul Fazl, the author of the original manuscript, says that Mani had "learnt the art of painting in which he had attained incomparable skill. He painted some wonderful figures which were celebrated by the name of Artang. Mani claimed that they were really not paintings by himself, but by angels, and brought them forward as witness of his prophetic mission."

It may be that these figures went with the arrival of the Moghul kings, for on religious grounds they would not permit of pictures of the living form. This is evidenced in the sculpture of the temples which they could not destroy because of their immenseness. In these, stone masons were called to deface the Hindu figures either by rubbing them flat or converting the human forms to curves and scrolls—in places to words.

Then Blockmann, in his book written in 1873 on the life of Akbar, declares that the great Emperor Akbar by way of explanation for shutting his eyes to the hitherto accepted ruling said, "It appears to me as if a painter had quite peculiar means of recognising God; for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he can bestow individuality upon his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the giver of life, and will thus increase in knowledge". He encouraged painting in the Iranian manner. In the Victoria and Albert Museum in London there are twenty-four large paintings on cotton-cloth which experts declare were produced in Kashmir about the middle of the sixteenth century. These are believed to have been the illustrations of a book of stories, its name and that of its author being untraceable. The best-preserved of these pictures has a garden with chinar trees; the rocklike mountain background in most is certainly like that of Kashmir. Abul Fazl, the author of the original book before referred to, says in his work that Mulla Jamil, a singer in the

court of Zain-ul-Ab-ul-Din, "was foremost among his contemporaries in the arts of painting", but he does not tell us where; there is a possibilty that these decorations were upon the walls of the palace and that age has obliterated them. In the old summer houses of Shalimar and the other Moghul gardens, there still remain portions which are claimed as having been the original paintings, and there is the possibility that they are, and have been kept bright by touching up.

Percy Brown, an acknowledged authority, in his valuable contribution to history, *Indian Painting under the Moghuls*, written in 1924, writing of the artists from all over the world at Akbar's Delhi court, says, "although not exactly of alien origin, we may include a group of five painters from Kashmir, a country which for centuries has maintained a high artistic tradition". Five! That so many could be spared from the Valley is proof in itself that there must have been many. And yet no trace of them remains. It is this writer also who suggests, in writing of certain old pictures of flowers, goats, and one in particular of a great chinar tree with goats in the background, that they must have been painted in Kashmir. He explains how the Kashmiri artists of old, in their paintings on paper, used first to paint with water, which when it had evaporated, left a slight sediment; this used as the background tint to the figure, left a faint and very charming contrast of tone for the flesh colours which were painted upon it, an art which was peculiar to Kashmiri artists alone.

So much for the Vale of Kashmir, but there are other provinces within the State. In the monasteries of Ladakh the walls are painted with stories of the ancient battles between Good and Evil, some are scenes, others are pictures of the gods alone: although of a Chinese flavour there is little doubt that, as is claimed, some of these must have been painted by the lamas themselves. Sir Auriel Stein in 1931 suddenly made known the discovery by a shepherd-boy in the northern hills of Kashmir, of coloured drawings bound within painted covers which are said to have been executed in Kashmir by Buddhists in the fifth century.

Then of Jammu and the other small states which lie either without the inner or outer mountain range; it is known that

towards the end of the reign of Aurangzeb, and during the time of those who followed him, because of the economic and political disturbances, the court painters and artists who found their royal patrons in Delhi had little appreciation for their work, sought the patronage of the smaller courts of the Rajas who lived at the foot of the Punjab hills. In their kingdoms, principalities and states, which spread to a length of about two hundred miles, they set up schools of painting, and their work is spoken of as "The Jammu School", being claimed as an off-shoot of the Rajasthan School of painting; yet the work which came from the brushes of these artists bears its own stamp with the local variations of background distinctions and the peculiarities of the several masters of the schools, it being easy for the expert to tell whether they were the products of the Poonch school, from which came some notable pictures of their Rajas and patrons, or of the Jammu school. Most of these paintings were miniatures, their creators appear to have been impressed by cloud effects which were so often found clinging to the distant mountain tops in those parts, as opposed to Delhi where the sky is for months a clear, uninteresting blue, the only variation being its differing shades as the seasons progress. So it is that we find few of the old pictures painted there without a high horizon with curling cloud formations, even though the scene be of the night.

The portraits which remain show the figures in very stiff attitudes, as though the coats they wore had been starched; if the unfortunate model had to stand for long as now shown in the picture, then he must have suffered agonies in so doing, with flower in hand stuck out before him and standing fixed in a position of "attention". Most are of the profile, the character facing either direct right or left; otherwise they were full face, a few only were at an angle, and the artists delighted in "improving" the portrait with thick gold ornaments and jewellery so painted with real gold or powdered down precious stones which seem as though enamelled on, being rather like emboss work. Some have had amazing decorations given to their garments, these being tiny portions of beetle wings stuck on and incorporated into the costume; it is said that butterfly wings were also used for this purpose, but these being more delicate, have since

turned to dust. I have little doubt that this was so though, for I have seen one otherwise perfect miniature which it is claimed was painted in Poonch, which has a number of bare spots on a ceremonial cloak shaped like a peacock's tail, such a picture can conceivably have been so decorated.

A chapter dealing with Kashmiri painting would be incomplete without some reference to calligraphy, the art of decorative writing, which is slightly different from that of illuminated writing as known in Europe and America. This style of decoration was frequently used to display passages from the Koran, just as in the old days stitch-work texts from the Bible were enclosed in very ornamental frames and placed on the walls of bedrooms, although, as with some of the books which were written in Europe before printing was invented, it was also used by kings and rulers within those books they intended to pass down through history. The pages were decorated with a thick surround of coloured decoration consisting of flowers and leaves so that to those who could not appreciate the beauty of the curves of the text, this appeared the more lovely.

Besides the scribes which were attached to the court, there were also the calligraphers. The cover would be written by them sometimes together with the title pages to the different sections. Those who have studied the curves and varying thicknesses of the Arabic and Persian letters will at once appreciate the beauty of the curves and the symmetric and artistic drawing upon the sheet of paper of some of the words in these old texts, just as "copper plate" writing can be admired for its worth in the Western world.

In the courts of kings, such men were of considerable importance and carried much weight with their masters. The Emperor Akbar had among his calligraphists a Kashmiri, by name Muhammad Hussain, whose penmanship he said had the effects of magic, and whom he honoured with the title of "Zarrin Qalam," meaning "Of the golden pen"; critics consider that this artist surpassed his own master in the glorious curvatures and extensions found everywhere in perfect proportion in his writings. The Emperor Jahangir, who in his autobiography speaks of him as "the chief of the elegant writers of the day", so appreciated his work that he presented him with an elephant.

The Emperor Shah Jahan's favourite court calligraphist was a Kashmiri named Muhammad Murad. Of him it has been said that "he was a master of both the small and the large hand", and on him the Emperor conferred the title of "Shirin Qalam".— "Of the sweet pen". His younger brother was also a well-known calligraphist, both were sons of a wealthy Valley merchant, and both were also artists with words—poets. One can imagine how beautifully those particular works which were entire creations of their own must have been presented.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Character of the Peoples

Now of the people. What are they really like? What are their true characters?

Here again we must divide them up, but not so much into States and Provinces, as to separate them as they have been by the mountains.

Those who live beyond the ring of mountains which surround the Valley are the men of Jammu, of Poonch and of Gilgit. They are the fighters; at times in the past they have either been the attackers or have helped those others who have invaded the Valley. From among them came some of the finest troops in the old Indian Army; they have proved themselves to be fearless and trustworthy to those to whom they offered their allegiance; fed, drilled and trained with regularity, they developed a physique of good quality, although the temperament of all three remained different. The man of Jammu will sometimes smile, the man of Gilgit seldom, for with him life has been hard; the land from which he comes yields grudgingly. On the other hand the man from Poonch, who comes from midway between the two, both in the position of his State and the productivity of his lands, in his early years seems to prefer soldiering to working upon the land, to which he returns after he has earned himself a small pension. In all they are generally men that you can always rely upon; providing you are their friend they will stand by you, and come what may will never desert you in time of trouble. More particularly does this refer to the two northern states; never did the expression "taken at face value" better apply. But they can be fanatical, these men, over their love affairs, and will desert and suffer anything to get those they have set their hearts upon, caste, creed and race meaning nothing;

then, having got them, if young and attractive they will jealously guard them, if not, they will amazingly either ignore them or cast them aside after a few years or even months. It seems as though their desire is only to prove their ability to acquire and possess for a while, then interest goes. They are however men you can always trust with life and possessions, they will never rob a friend or master. If they hate, or if they discover that their trust has been misplaced, then their hatred can be such that they will kill, that "quality" being increasingly apparent as the land becomes the more barren and they can ill afford to carry those who are not friends. And although over the years each have been subdued by invaders, those who came did not find the task an easy one, for although beaten, the vanquished remained men, holding their heads proudly erect; they do not cringe nor even fawn, they are not "nice".

Of the men of the north-east and the east, the men of Ladakh; they are not fighters, they are those who lead the lives expected of a nation of which about a sixth have given themselves up during "this day of life" to religion alone, whether it be as a working brother or one who spends his days and nights in meditation. But they are honest; you can trust their word; they are steadfast and true to those they make their friends; they will not rob a guest; they are simple people who smile through life and have nothing to fear. From time to time they have had to submit to suppression, but the periods have not been as many or as ghastly as others have known.

Then we come to the men of the Valley, those who are usually referred to as "The Kashmiri", and of whom much of this book has been written. What of them?

Before we study this let us turn for a while to some of the factors which have contributed to the characters of the people, those particular factors which were natural calamities. Occasionally one now reads of a slight earth tremor somewhere in the Himalayas; this has gone on for thousands, millions of years; there is ample proof that terrific upheavals have taken place there in the past, and there are known to have been the most devastating earthquakes in the Valley. The first that is recorded took place in the time of the ruler Sudar Sena, whose reign lasted from 2082 to 2041 B.C. "The middle of the city was rift,

and water gushed from the river, the hills and the mountains, and it submerged the whole city"—now the Wular Lake. In A.D. 1500 an earthquake continued for three months. In A.D. 1552 came another, which lasted for two months, and one lasted for about the same period of time when it occured in A.D. 1662. In 1735 came one which lasted for three months and destroyed a thousand houses, but that was not as long in days as the one of just over fifty years later, in A.D. 1778, when the shocks continued for a year. So they went on one after the other, the chroniclers making a special note of those in 1803 when "the spire of the Shah Hamadan Mosque was destroyed". The most terrible one took place at three in the morning of May 30, 1884. Then it was that a fissure seven hundred feet long, three hundred feet wide and seventy feet deep occurred at Laridur and six houses with all their occupants disappeared into it. Ten thousand houses were destroyed, three thousand three hundred and ninety people died, forty thousand head of cattle were lost and the shocks went on for two and a half months. The results were terrible, the people in a pathetic state, so that the Maharaja contributed thirty thousand rupees for rebuilding their houses and he also remitted two lacs of rupees in land revenues. Neve writing in his book, *Beyond the Pir Panjal*, of those awful days during which he and his workers snatched but little sleep from their rescue work, tells of the raging fires which broke out, since so many of the people had left their kangris burning, which, overturning, soon made the fallen houses a roaring mass of flames.

Next in their terrifying visitations came the floods. The first recorded earthquake brought in its wake the great flood. Most of these earthquakes, especially when they came in the spring, brought this added terror, though the floods were the more frequent. There was one in 1379 when ten thousand houses went, another in 1746 when the same number of houses and all the bridges on the Jhelum were carried away. One frightful one took place in 1787 when the Dal Gate gave way and the whole of the eastern portion of the city of Srinagar was submerged, and so they went on. In these days much has been done to relieve the pressure of water on the banks of the great river which drains the valley, its bed has also been deepened at

Baramula, but there are still times, when, with the spring melting of the mountain snows, the high banks burst, and this is just when the crops are beginning to show promise for the harvesting, when the people are living on what little remains in the barns from the previous year—a hand-to-mouth existence; truly an awful happening when it occurs.

Of famines in this land of plenty, and mostly brought about by the other calamities, the pages are filled. We read of one during the years Tunjina I ruled, which was from 150 to 114 B.C., when snow fell in the month of August, destroying all the rice crops. Most of these famines were brought about by untimely rains, and since the peasants were forced to send so much to the city, they had no grains left with which to feed themselves, so that it was always the peasants of the villages who suffered. Of the famine in A.D. 1832 they tell that Maharaja Ranjit Singh started from Lahore to visit Kashmir, and ordered his Governor to collect sufficient supplies for his camp. He did, and left the peasant people very little for themselves. Then in the month of October—harvest time—a heavy snowfall destroyed all the crops. The following year Colonel Mian Singh, the Governor who came to Kashmir, "standing on the balcony of the Palace saw that there was not one lamp lit in the city, and heard not a single cock crow with the dawn, for all had been eaten by the famine-stricken". He had quantities of grain and fowls brought from the Punjab, and the following year all was well. There was a bad famine in 1864, but that of 1877 was ghastly. It is said that two thirds of the population died of starvation, and although the Maharaja had thousands of maunds of grain brought from the Punjab, the famine went on for two and a half years. The main troubles were brought on, not by drought, but by the summer floods, and also in a few cases by early snows, whilst the isolated position of the country has made it difficult to bring in supplies during the months of scarcity. From time to time in its history, the invading armies, living on the land and plundering it as they retired, have also been responsible.

The last of the natural calamities have been the dreadful epidemics of cholera, going back to 1604, which date suggests that invaders brought it from the Punjab. There was a "plague" in 1089 though. Of cholera the recorders have mentioned "a

period of forty days with a virulence which staggered humanity, the numbers of dead being so many that they could not be buried or cremated and therefore had to be thrown into the river"! Thousands died each time, and from a record at hand between 1783 and 1910 there were no less than fifteen visitations. The largest number of cases occurred in 1910 when with nine thousand two hundred and eleven deaths out of nearly eighteen thousand five hundred patients, there were less lives lost than in the dreadful year of 1892 when eleven thousand seven hundred died of the sixteen thousand eight hundred odd that were seized with it; proof that medical science, so soon as it was permitted to do so, saved the lives of many who were stricken down. In these days outbreaks are rare, since there have been great efforts to improve the conditions of sanitation, although they are still far from perfect; there is now also a good water supply brought from the hills behind the city, this being piped throughout its streets and into many of the larger houses. The people have yet to learn how to protect themselves by cleanliness though.

All these epidemics and natural calamities have come upon the people, but in addition there have, throughout the centuries, been the ever-present conquerors, oppressors and masters who have taken and held the country in their power, each of the rulers with different edicts, each with changing moods, some kindly, others inhuman. For the most part over the years one community of the people had death always before them as the punishment for failing to do physically or accept mentally that which their masters forced upon them.

They were starved by them of those necessities of life which they had both made and grown in plenty with sufficient and more to keep them and their families. They learned to lie in order to save themselves and their loved ones from destruction at times; they learned to trust no stranger, for fear that he might have come to rob them; they learned to hoard and hide against the famine which might come on them through the elements or the invaders, and because of that and their having little, to steal when the chance presented itself; they learned to fear the sword and the gun for what both had done to them and theirs. They learned to appear poor, and in doing so to be filthy, so that those

who taxed them might be deceived into extracting less of what little they had to treasure.

So it had been that with this ever grinding down, the people of the Valley had fallen into a state of most shocking degradation, with a fear which had become nothing short of cowardice, so that those men who live in the hills of their country to the north, the west and the south, correct you in a flash if by mistake you refer to them as Kashmiris. It is a terrible state for the people of any nation to have fallen into, but there is not the slightest doubt that they have been forced down to it through the generations until their morale has almost, but not quite, disappeared, for they had not even been taught how to defend themselves; they did not know how to fight and protect their loved ones, they had not learned how to kill even when driven to it by temper, as is proved by the very few murders which take place in the Valley.

It would be as well to read what others who have gone before have said of them, what "foreigners"—many of whom have spent almost a lifetime amongst them and "liked them in spite of all"—have in many cases regretfully had to admit, for these men of the valley of Kashmir cannot be taken at their face value as can their brothers on the other side of the mountains which for a while protected them against attack, but also prevented their escape.

Moorcroft, who made his travels through Kashmir between 1819 and 1825, said the people were "suffering from the most loathsome diseases brought about by scant and unwholesome food, dark, damp, and ill-ventilated lodgings, excessive dirtiness and gross immorality". He declared that "at present a more degraded race does not exist"; that in character the Kashmiri was then "selfish, superstitious and false" and "his transactions are always conducted in a fraudulent spirit, equalled only by the effrontery with which he faces detection". He says though that "the vices of the Kashmirian I cannot help considering are as the effects of his political condition rather than his nature, and conceive that it would not be difficult to transform him into a very different being". Also referring to their ingenuity, he says that "with a wise government they might assume an equally high scale as a moral and intellectual people."

And it is interesting to read him writing of their physique, not of those men of the city, who even in those days were slight, but of the Hindu and the Muslim country peasants, that "there are to be found figures of robust and muscular make, such as might have served for models of the Farnesan Hercules."

Then we come to G. T. Vigne, whose book on his travels was published in 1842. He writes of "the broad Herculean build and manly features of the Kashmirian peasant, contrasting with his whining complaints and timid disposition", but carefully points out that one must take into consideration the fact that these might well be "the effects of a long continued subjection to tyranny and despotism", and later goes on, "the same want of courage which obliges them to have recourse to artifice and dishonesty, has caused their other faults to be regarded in a still more unfavourable light, for as far as mere morality is concerned, I shall say that the Kashmirian has very much the advantage of both Sikh and Pathan". This last sentence can be ambiguous to those who know all three races intimately. He says also that "they are certainly a lying and deceitful race of people".

Frederick Drew, writing in his book, *The Jammoo and Kashmir Territories*, in 1875, by which time another generation had been born, said of them, "They are false-tongued, ready with a lie and given to various forms of deceit. They are noisy and quarrelsome, ready to wrangle, but not to fight: on the least exercise or threat of force they will cry like children. They have indeed, a wide reputation for being faint-hearted and cowardly". What a terrible mental state for any people to have been driven down to, and this was not just one community, it was the people of one whole valley. Of the hanjis, the class of the country which most Europeans come into contact with he said, "They are men of active imagination . . . always ready with lying legends. They are excessively greedy, never satisfied as long as they think there is the least chance of getting more. Their cowardice is proverbially a characteristic of the Kashmiri".

But according to him also, they had their good points. He admits that he had met with men of the land "who as against physical dangers bore themselves well", and this is important,

"in intellect they are superior to their neighbours, they are certainly keener than Punjabis, and in perception and clearness of mind and ingenuity far outvie their masters, the Dogras".

At that time Wilson wrote his famous book, *The Abode of Snow*, in which he mentions the Chinese traveller Fa-Hian who went there hundreds of years before and spoke of the Kashmiri "as being of a particularly bad character", and himself observes, "even where there are so many deceitful nations they have obtained a pre-eminence". But he also says, "I cannot deny the truth of the accusations brought against them, yet I could not but pity them, and sympathise with them". "They are not unattractive, being an intellectual people, and characterised by great ingenuity and sprightliness". "I think also that they have the elements of what, in more fortunate circumstances, might be a fine character, but dwelling in a fertile and beautiful valley, surrounded by hardy and warlike tribes, they have for ages been subject to that oppression which destroys national hope and virtue."

Then we go on, for we should take these people generation by generation, and of them Lawrence, who knew them well and to whom they may be grateful for the land reforms which he was the cause of introducing into the country, said in his book, *The Valley of Kashmir*, written in 1895, "The Kashmiri bears an evil reputation in the Punjab, and indeed throughout Asia. Proverbs liken him to a snake in his morals and to a fowl in his manners, and men are warned against admitting a Kashmiri to their friendship." He, endeavouring to get an old Kashmiri to explain to him their existing misery, says that they attributed "all to two leading features of the national character, lying and envy or malice. A Kashmiri cannot bear to see anyone getting on in life". "He is very timid and conducts himself in the most abject manner towards officials. It is impossible to believe a Kashmiri when he is dealing with officials of the country or when he is presenting a petition in the city, but in his own village and in the presence of his fellow-villagers I have found it fairly easy to elicit the truth." He also speaks of their weak-hearted, somewhat soft nature, of their being extremely dirty in their habits and person, of their easily being moved to tears and of another "quality", which in spite of all they have gone

through they still possess, their conceit. But he also gives them the credit for being more intellectual than those of the rest of the then India, being quick in an argument and ready of wit. Of the people who lived in the villages, he says, "one rarely heard of divorce scandals or immorality". Finally he concludes with, "though the character of the Kashmiri leaves much to be desired, I think that it is to their credit that it is not worse, considering the few chances they have had for becoming truthful, manly and self-respecting. A man who can be beaten and robbed by anyone with a vestige of authority soon ceases to respect himself". Lawrence bluntly declares that, "The Kashmiri is what his rulers have made him, but I believe and hope that two generations of a just and strong rule will transform him into a useful, intelligent, and fairly honest man".

In 1912 Doctor Ernest Neve, who had worked there for years as the surgeon in the Mission Hospital, divided the people up when commenting on their character; he speaks of the Kashmiri as being "by nature deceitful and given to petty larceny", of the coolie, being timid, afraid of being left alone in the dark, inclined to untruthfulness and deceit—but not all of them; he mentions those "who have risked their lives for others, and with no applauding gallery and no laudatory press to approve". Then, "In spite of his great physical strength and powers of endurance, the Kashmiri is highly strung and neurotic, and he will often weep on slight provocation. These people can bear pain much better than Europeans, but owing to want of self-control they make more fuss. Naturally impulsive and huffy, they respond readily to tactful handling." This is the opinion of a doctor, from whose books one can immediately see that he was also a student of human nature, a psychologist who, having lived among these people for years, knew them as they were in their daily life and in their adversities and sicknesses; that then was his explanation of their "cowardice". A neurotic state which they had been driven into over the generations of oppression.

The Reverend C. E. Tyndale-Biscoe, who was for years, the headmaster of the Mission School, and who in the books he wrote tells how he spent his time "making men of this effeminate race of males", in his autobiography which was published after

his death, says of the morals of the men in those times of which he writes that it would appear that there remained few lusts or perversions which were unsatisfied and unpractised in the Valley, not only by the invaders but also by the men of the land who provided from among their own peoples for those in India whose bent was in that direction.

In his previous book, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, he says, "The ordinary Kashmiri such as I have known for thirty years is a coward, a man with no self-respect and deceitful to a degree". His explanation for this being "because they happen to live in one of the most beautiful countries on earth, and therefore other people have coveted it. Kashmir has been conquered and reconquered by invaders, who have murdered, oppressed and enslaved their ancestors, and so ground the life and heart out of them that their better selves have been crushed."

Yet he declares that "gradually are the Kashmiris rising from slavery to manhood, though the growth is naturally very slow at present, but they are on the upward road."

So there we have the Kashmiri character as seen through the eyes of foreigners over the past hundred and fifty years, both those who have passed through it and those who lived amongst the people and really loved them, they have each offered their opinions as to why the people dropped to such a state of degradation. I will myself say that the improvement which Neve and Tyndale-Biscoe noted has further progressed, although those who live outside the frontiers still do not speak well of the Kashmiri. He is without question still filthy in his person, he still has not learnt that in business one must stick to the truth, must supply goods to the sample which has been submitted, must dispatch those which have been selected and paid for and not exchange them for others when the buyer has gone. He still has to realize that within that white-topped ring of mountains there are men who are physically capable of protecting their own lovely land from attack without having to call in others to do it for them now that those "tools" with which this is possible are no longer witheld from their hands. He still has to cast jealousy aside and appreciate that there are also among his own countrymen those who have the political and

administrative ability and the desire honestly to lead their own people without showing favour to any sect. He has, after having it ingrained into him for hundreds of years, to laugh at the mysticism and superstition which has been drummed into him by ignorant pirs, sufis, sadhus and even priests and mullahs, who should long since have been exposed, degraded and cast out from the precincts of temples, mosques and shrines by the elders of the religions. He still has to learn that after all these years he can tell the truth and start life anew without fear of the past creeping up behind and strangling him. And finally he still has to learn to forget all the dark and terrible years in which he suffered nothing but degradation, fear and shame, little of which was of his own making, and regaining his self-respect, look to the future which, if only he will make the supreme effort, holds so very much for him. For the fair land of Kashmir is still there in spite of all that has happened within its borders; it is for him to make of it something fine and grand so that those of his race who follow him will be proud to ack-knowledge to being a Kashmiri, not only because of the beauty of the lakes, the valleys and the mountains, but for the integrity and the manliness of the people to which it belongs.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Two Main Roads

OF the roads which lead out of the Valley into India and into Pakistan, there are two which are the most favoured, the one to Rawalpindi in Pakistan and known as the Jhelum Valley road, the other to Jammu and thence into India, usually referred to as the old Banihal cart road. Other routes exist; they were used in the old days by the Moghul Emperors when they came to the country, but the roads have not been reconstructed to take modern traffic.

In those old days the most favoured route was over the Pir Panjal Pass, which is at a height of eleven thousand feet. It took weeks to cover, with the men travelling on horseback, the women reclining not too comfortably in palanquins carried on the shoulders of sweating coolies, besides which there were large retinues of courtiers and retainers, together with companies of soldiers to protect them, in addition to hundreds of coolies and servants with all the paraphernalia, for these Emperors insisted on much of the pomp and ceremony which they had been accustomed to in their courts being continued with these peaceful entries into the country. At places on this old road are still to be seen the great serais, stone-walled acres of land in which the camps were set, but contained within the walls were rooms and a mosque since at times the ruler would tarry there for many days. There are still to be seen the ruins of towers which were really block houses, built to cover and protect the smaller bands of travellers who ventured the road. Where villages now are, there is usually to be found the place where such travellers halted for the night, and the old rest houses built since those days are in some cases in use to this day for the same purpose.

Before the two new Dominions obtained their independence it was not unusual for the visitor who wanted to see as much as he could of the country, to enter Kashmir from Rawalpindi and leave it via Jammu. The road from Rawalpindi did not exist until the turn of the century and in all probability even then would not have been made had not Russia displayed a threatening attitude towards the northern and western frontiers of India—the Hindu Kush. Then it was that the Government of India, with the help of British engineers, built in record time, for the use of troops, the road which the State of Kashmir had been contemplating for many years, and had in fact started in places. The State engineers had finished the portion between Kohala and Domel—a little over twenty miles; the distance from there to Baramula, where it was to join the road and the navigable river to Srinagar, was seventy-eight miles further though. The small section they had completed had taken them five years. Spelding, a contractor was called in to finish the job; he brought in his own engineers and gangs of Pathans and Afghan coolies who were the toughest characters, many being deserters from the Indian Army, many murderers who had fled their own country—admittedly murders which had been committed for the honour of their families, but killings just the same. They were hot-tempered men, but good strong workers, and the road, built against what to some would appear insurmountable odds and conditions, was completed and in use within two years.

This road from Rawalpindi, a large town on the Pakistan railway between Lahore and Peshawar, is open for most of the year; its blockage by snow seldom lasts for more than two or three days, but the most difficult and dangerous of its troubles is the shale which falls during the rains, mostly in the spring; then the road is blocked until gangs of coolies, which are always stationed there, can clear it, whilst damage and loss of life can also result from a bad fall of shale which often drops without warning. That, it is said, is the main reason why a railway has never been considered to be a practical proposition on this particular route, which would otherwise, joining the main line at Rawalpindi, have given Kashmir easy access all the year round to the sea port of Karachi.

The distance covered by this road to Srinagar is about two hundred miles. The motorist usually completed the journey in a day, starting off after an early breakfast and reaching Srinagar for dinner, though those who were out to enjoy the scenery, which at places is really lovely, or those who were nervous and could not stand for too many miles the dozens of twists and turns with steep ascents and descents, took two days to make the journey and stayed overnight at one of the many rest houses, usually choosing that at Domel.

In the old days when two-horsed tongas were used to travel the rough road, the journey was agony to the European, if he happened to be in one of the seats facing the poor wretched horses' galled, thin backs; the sight alone spoiled all pleasures of the glorious views, especially when for a stage they had a driver who never ceased to apply the so-called "whip"—a stick which only continued to bruise the spines of the poor creatures. On first making that journey there were few passengers who in their fury did not grab the stick from the man, usually breaking it over their knees to demonstrate their disgust of his treatment: only after this did the stick prove to the irate passenger its usefulness, for the wretched animals, instead of responding to this humane sentiment, just stood with legs firm and refused to budge, with the result that the driver won in the end. The syce together with his horses changed at every stage, these usually being five miles apart but depending on the gradient of road. The tonga went the whole way; it would hardly have been possible to unload and reload it each time, for luggage was packed and tied on everywhere, often with bed rolls roped to the top of the canvas cover, and suit cases tied on the top of the wheel mud-guards.

The poorer people, those who did not trudge the road with their loads upon their backs, travelled by bullock cart, which was also used for heavy luggage, the journey taking about two weeks, or in an ekka; this is a high slung, single-horse cart, over which is a framework rather like a bird cage on which is spread cloth—usually rags—to protect the women who travel in it, sitting on the hard board floor. The proper thing for the men to do is either sit in front, or if a servant was travelling with his master's luggage, he seated himself on top of it; if the

master also chose to make the journey this way, he sat facing backwards and had a step fitted on which to place his feet and so save them from dangling. The ekka took about five days to cover the road between Rawalpindi and Srinagar.

The "pleasures" of travel in those days have now gone though. The change came gradually, for after a while it was not unusual to pass a carriage and pair; now it is mostly cars and lorries which make the journey. The tongas, ekkas and bullock wagons are still on the road, but only between villages; even then 'bus services run between these, and lorry "seats" are to be had, either next to the driver—considered almost first class travel—or on top of the load. The driver of these usually expects to make quite a few rupees with these unofficial passengers who sleep, and have not been unknown to roll off from the high load.

The route from Rawalpindi to Srinagar is divided up into fourteen stages, not that this interests the traveller by car as it did those who went behind horses. The first stage, a distance of fourteen miles to Barakao, is at an altitude of about seventeen hundred feet above the sea. The road is level, fringed with trees and generally uninteresting to one who has been on the plains. But for the next stage to Tret, the climb is up through low brown foothills; in summer these are sprinkled with burnt-up scrub; the sun, if the day has advanced, can be scorching, the road dusty; in spring, though, it is different, and becomes a sufferable journey. As usual, at a difficult corner a toll bar is come upon. Tret stands elevated four thousand feet above the sea, and here is to be found the first rest house.

A further thirteen miles, and just two miles after Sunny Bank, lies Murree, a famous and fashionable hill station spread out over the mountains at an altitude of anything between six and seven thousand feet, which have been reached through pine-covered slopes and up many zig-zag roads and hairpin bends. Here is built a modern town, with rest house, hotels, boarding houses, a great sanatorium, a convent, schools, cinemas and churches: it is the hill station for those who live in Rawalpindi, and also for many from Peshawar and Lahore. From here a lovely view can be had of the plains, while in the distance are the glorious snow-covered ranges of mountains, which are amazingly even in their height, few being below

fourteen thousand feet and none over sixteen thousand; at intervals on the Poonch side great masses stand out from them like bastions, making it difficult to believe that some giant hand had not built this wall.

Murree is a health resort, the place where pallid cheeks gain a pink glow within a few days, the resort which, because of its climate, makes Pakistan tolerable to the long-suffering European who serves there. The air is invigorating, there is usually a coolish breeze, and within a very short while those who have arrived there "just to laze the days away", find themselves suggesting long walks through the wonderfully interesting hills, past babbling brooks, along narrow paths which lead through pink-barked, scented pines, firs and shady trees to some "special spot of our own", probably one such as is often passed on the road-side where the rocks are black wet with water and green with slime, but decorated with masses of dainty, trembling maidenhair ferns which cling to them, growing out from every crack and crevice that will offer them a root hold; they are large leafed, with shining black, wire-like stems.

Those who stay there can sit and cool themselves in contemplation of the far distant snows and admire the beauty of the country lying below their feet and above their heads, with all its differing shades of colours and variety of the shapes of the trees; the smoke-like wisps of cloud which are blown and drawn by air currents up and down the slopes; the intriguing red rooftops of a hill-station house among the firs and pines, and little gardens of the peasants, which are terraced down spurs of the mountains, and the winding tracks—those you had never realized existed—with the load-carrying coolies striding down with empty baskets on their back, or struggling up with a load, in their hands a T shaped stick on which to rest it when they stand, for the basket or package is carried high on their backs; a head strap across the forehead stops the load from falling back as they climb; once on the ground it would be impossible to lift back unaided.

Kohala, which is the next stage on from Murree, is nearly thirty miles distant. The descent from the hills is steep, and it squats, stuffy and airless, shut in between hills at a height of only eighteen hundred feet above the sea level. In summer it is

unbearably hot, in June and July frequently reaching a temperature of 115° Fahrenheit, so that few people stop at the Dak bungalow. It is an important place on the route though, for here stands the custom's house. The bridge which spans the Jhelum passes from Pakistan to Kashmir: this is an unusual bridge which quite a number of writers have noted. There used to be a suspension type of structure here, but it was washed away, as are so many others which fall beneath avalanches or through landslides in those parts. The one which is now there stands out from one side—the safe side—and a light steel extension connects the nose of the bridge with the other mainland, so that in the event of a landslide, this light portion of the "bridge" goes, and can be quickly replaced.

After passing over the river the road winds along the left bank of the Jhelum; it is a grand piece of engineering, in parts passing through short tunnels blasted through rock massifs which rise sheer from the river below. In some places just a loose knit rock wall serves as protection from falling over the edge of a precipice into the raging river beneath, at others the rock has been carved out so that it overhangs; here the road is oftimes narrow, though in other places—fortunately on the bends—it is wide, with ample room to stop the car and admire the country, which is particularly grand with high, barren hills rising steeply on either side; lone farms and tiny villages seem to cling to the hill sides, with small, terraced fields close by. Sparkling streams come down like waterfalls from heights; in places the result is surprising in that many of these, though spread wide, high on the mountain side, gradually come together to join the main stream. All are glittering with crystal waters from the snows in springtime, and combined make it appear like a gigantic fan which shimmers as some great, invisible goddess gently moves her hands so that she might enjoy the cool and refreshing breeze. Through gaps in these hills can be seen the snow-capped peaks of the ranges in the distance, with here and there a glistening peak.

Twenty-one miles from Kohala, and eighty-five from 'Pindi lies Domel, the most northerly place on the road, which, for the last few miles is cut sheer out of the cliff face; here landslips are not unusual after the rains. This is the most suitable place to

stop overnight if the journey is being divided up into two days; there is a State rest house with a number of private houses. The main road is joined by one from Abbattabad, one which may be used in the winter when the Murree hills are covered with snow; this road runs back to the north-west for about fifty miles to Abbattabad, and although rather narrow, is always open: it can be seen crossing the ridge above the river and towards the west. Here also the river Jhelum is joined by its largest tributary, the Kishenganga; about the same in size, both flow for a short distance side by side before marrying, then it is easy to pick out in the spring and summer months the Jhelum which is light brown with the muddy deposits it has gathered on its long passage through Kashmir, and the Kishenganga, a light, clear, greenish blue from the snows which have fed it. In the dry autumn the Jhelum is an opaque green, brought about by the large quantity of organic matter suspended in it, whilst the water of the other river is a peacock shade, still clear and transparent.

In the old days petty chiefs ruled the tribes in these parts, and they were forever at war with each other, even with their neighbours across the closest ridges; yet when outsiders attacked one of them, all would join together to protect their land.

Only a day's march to the west lies the Black Mountain frontier where lived the "Yagi" Pathan tribes who made this road to Kashmir far from secure. The Frenchman Jacquemont records that in his travels, which were in 1831, he was provided by Ranjit Singh with a strong escort to save him from being taken captive, from being held to ransom, or being blackmailed.

Fourteen miles further on is Garhi, where some people prefer to stop the night, as it has another rest house, this one being rather beautifully placed in its compound just above the main road. One of the famous sights of the Jhelum Valley route used to be a great rope bridge which here spanned the river; this has now been replaced by a modern bridge. The scenery is quite different again. At three thousand feet the valley opens up; there are distant views of the wooded hills; it is greener, fresher and not unlike the English country roads and lanes; there is a crispness in the air, so that at night a blanket is needed;

no longer does one sweat and lie restless on the bed. Of that part Bernier wrote in his letters of far back in 1660, "I find myself transported on a sudden from a torrid to a temperate zone, the mountains we were traversing being covered with every one of our plants and shrubs; I had almost imagined myself in the mountains of Auvergne". And of this journey Arthur Neve commented in his book, *Picturesque Kashmir*, in 1899, "Early in April, when the wheat is ripening in Domel, it is at Chakoti only in the ear, at Uri, though the fields are green, the deciduous trees are almost leafless and at Baramula snow may be lying in the hollows, the fields are bare, and there are all the signs of early spring". It is surprising to find poles fixed upright to the four corners of the bed, for mosquitoes are often found here, and in the autumn can be a pest to those who have not brought a net to cover the bed.

Between here and Uri there is some really lovely scenery, much of which is truly magnificent, with lofty peaks towering up on either side, the road at times snaking its way through narrow gorges in which the river Jhelum flows, at times placid and with great swirling pools of brownish water, at others foaming and rushing as it escapes through some close held ravine or rock, rock which is so hard that the centuries of wear has not widened it, so hard that it will turn an ordinary chisel with ease.

Uri has a delightful old rest house with electricity for lights and fans, a luxury the visitor had thought might be unknown in Kashmir after the smoking oil lamps and hand fans of late. The gorge of the river before Uri is reached is so narrow that it is easy to cast a stone across it; the rocks drop vertically down to the water, the mountain sides are just like great castle buttresses of rock which rise from the rushing Jhelum. The town stands on a triangular plateau which is several hundred feet above the river, and as one nears it, especially when the river is low, there are to be seen several of those sloping, plateau-like, great alluvial fans which run down to the water. Uri is nearly four thousand five hundred feet above sea level; once it was of importance, having its own Raja; now of no importance, the town has become little more than a large village. The fort is interesting though; its founder was at one

time said to have been a common khidmutgar—that, is a table bearer. He had been taken under the care of Ranjit Singh as a boy of seven, became one of his generals and is credited with having overcome the Afghans, "whose women so feared him that to frighten their children they quoted his name in a low deep voice. He was a tyrant in Kashmir, from where he was called after his two years' service from 1820." So the fort is not really very old. It became the home of the Raja from that time on.

Rampur, thirteen miles off, is the next stage of the journey. The road makes a great detour because of the gradient, and follows the contours of the mountains, so avoiding having to cross the large precipitous-sided nullah; after two or three miles you are astonished to find yourself almost back to where you started, the rest house lying across it, being but an arrow-shot away. The hillsides are mostly covered with loose shale, which is a menace at all times, for the rains wash it down on to the road, whilst later when it is all dried out in the sun, the moisture which bound it no longer has its hold, and it slips, a single stone soon collecting tons of the stuff as it tumbles down the mountain side. Although one does get a few seconds' warning of its descent by the terrifying swish and rumbling of the greater boulders, that is of little use for with the echoes of the hills it is difficult to decide, in the short time, from where the sound comes. The yellowish to purple-brown rocks which have been seen all the way from Domel, have now changed to slaty schists; later along the road they are replaced by limestone, and with it the scenery changes; there is now a wild beauty, with glorious forest trees, the ground spread with ferns and flowering bushes; the hills recede, the more gentle slopes being covered with tall deodar trees, standing straight and firm. Great precipices of limestone rise up from pine forests; here and there a fir or pine will have found a roothold on some small ledge and clinging tightly bends out and upwards as though searching for its sisters who crown the hill; here the countryside is truly lovely, and as such has been mentioned right from the earliest writers. Here it is that the gallery—or flume—six miles long, carries the water which, dropping four hundred feet, powers the turbines generating electricity for the Valley. On the way there

is the ruined Hindu temple which is said to date back to one century after the birth of Christ.

It seems here that Kashmir has at last been found, for there are walnut and chestnut trees; the flat-roofed houses are seen no more; in their place are the wooden ones with the flattish sloping roofs of Kashmir with wooden tiles or thatch. In spring wild roses of all colours, white, cream, pink and red, cover the bushes by the road side; here and there leafy trees hang out over it like great sunshades; the river widens and is quieter and although still brown, appears clearer. It is swift in places though, for dashing against a rock in its path, the splash of spray is high; here and there quiet pools have found their way into the softer rock, and willows shade these, protecting the fish which have fought so far up stream, and making such places interesting to the fisherman. The views across the river, of the hill-slopes covered with different kinds of trees, broken by great limestone cliffs and the distant snow-capped mountains, especially when the sun streams through the clouds to lighten one like a glistening wedding cake, or when the sunset lends them for a while a pearl-pink tinge which slowly turns to red, is indeed heavenly.

Sixteen miles further on lies Baramula; the road, as it has been for the last miles before Rampur, is comparatively level. Peasants are to be seen more often working in the fields and small rice patches; at parts the wide river which almost ripples over the stone bed is slower in its flow and permits the use of small boats. On the side are large rocks different from those seen thereabouts and believed to have been carried down from the mountains by glaciers long since forgotten. A narrow ravine carries a path which leads through to Gulmarg, and here, until recent years, were found numbers of bears. Higher up, in the month of June, the rocks will be decorated with the pink blooms of wild rhododendron which flourish there. Hereabouts, especially from Naushera onwards, terrible damage was done in the great earthquake of 1885, which is still not forgotten in those parts. In the distance can be seen the great peak of Nanga Parbat, right ahead, the near seventeen thousand feet high Mount Haramouk, which, as one gets closer to Baramula, seems to rise sheer from the waters of the Wular Lake; on a clear

day, far over to the right, the peak of Kolahoi is visible. Here the Valley of Kashmir opens before the road, but since it is on the same level does not appear to be as grand as when one bursts upon it from a high pass.

From the spread town of Baramula, the poplar-lined road goes through the flat fields to Srinagar. Some who go there still prefer to have their houseboat or donga meet them here so that they can continue the journey to the city by water. After that all is so quiet, the road with but few turns or twists; there is little to disturb the stillness except the occasional shout of a shepherd boy; no raging torrent runs below; there are no terrifying corners with honking lorries and hooting cars; no man or beast seems to be in a hurry, for it is the Vale of Kashmir, where nature has its sway. It is as though the unspoken greeting is "here rest a while".

Going out of Kashmir by the other route, a two hundred mile run to Jammu by the Banihal cart road, we left Srinagar at the other side of the city and passing the famous Pampur saffron fields, stopped in the village to buy some of its famed brand of biscuits, then went on past the ruins of the great light grey limestone temple built by King Avanti Varma in the eighth century; this is near to the roadside, surrounded by close-cropped turf, glorious in its broken and aged grandeur, especially in the spring when masses of mauve, wild iris spread around it. We continued on along the raised road through hundreds of acres of rice fields, with hamlets crushing on to the roadway, always seeming to have chosen a blind corner for their site. Tongas and bullock carts held tight to the single width tarred portion of the road and reluctantly gave way to us at the very last minute, to move over on to the dirt-built-up sides. Eventually, after thirty-two miles, we reached Khanabal, which adjoins Islamabad—by some called Anatnag. From here the poplar-lined road turns direct towards the distant mountains; still past fields of corn and rice, past small farms tucked away between willows, past clumps of the always four chinars on the wayside, past Muslim graveyards gay with mauve and white iris, shops which stand close on the edge of the road as if to demand that we stop to buy their wares from the sparsely spread shelves

or sloping floor, past dozens of carriers' lorries which met us from the opposite direction, but having been made to pay for not previously doing so, always pulling off the centre of the road well in time and so permitting each of us to hold the road with two of our four wheels.

Slowly we had been climbing until we passed Lower Munda, then Upper Munda, with its beautifully situated rest house with a wonderful view on the hillside. The country still open, was such that the road had to wind here and there as it followed the slopes; the crops had finished; the land remaining was now only fit for grazing the hundreds of goats and sheep which were under the care of small boys; a pretty little girl drove three small cows down to the village; we met less traffic as the road climbs the steeper side of the mountain, though even here there are woodlands high on one side and a gentle slope to the valley on the other, with the road ahead nearly always in view.

The road zig-zags higher and higher, the trees are now finished, then the bushes also have gone, just the scrub remains, and soon even that has disappeared. There is a hairpin bend, but the road is wide there since it is on a corner, round a great spur of the mountain, and the view is so grand that we took the car close to the great loose stone wall and gazed on the country below—the Vale of Kashmir—which in spring appears as though it is in flood, the reflection being from the rice fields under water from the irrigation channels. From there, looking down almost from the top of the pass, the Valley is very beautiful; the roads are easy to pick out with poplars lining them, the clumps of trees with the dark brown roofs of the houses, and here strangely enough the air was so still and quiet that we could hear a cow mooing far, far below. The only creatures we found high up there were flocks of goats which leapt the wall, over to the steep banks on the other side when we passed. In the distance are the red and purple, snow-topped mountains. We passed over a nullah built of concrete and made there to carry off the water from the rains or melting snow, then went under a portion of the road which is roofed with heavy logs, its side open; so constructed that the boulders, which are always falling down the mountain side, shall pass over and not block the road. At nine thousand feet is the Banihal Tunnel, where,

since it is only one car wide, we had to wait before passing through the six hundred and fifty feet bore of the mountain top. We looked back and down on the Valley of Kashmir for the last time, since on coming out on the other side, the mountain hides it. The view from here is especially wonderful to those who have come through from the bleakness of the other side; for that reason many recommend that on a circular tour this should be made the incoming road, and the Jhelum Valley one the outgoing.

The road down is bare of trees and bushes; the stone is of a different colour as in places it has been blasted or cut away to take the road which can be seen winding backwards and forwards in hairpin bends for nearly twenty miles ahead as it slowly descends to the lower plains.

Because of the height to which it rises, this road is snow-blocked for the greater part of the winter months, and for that period transport to and from India remains at a standstill. Some interesting figures are given in reports which have been made, and estimates given for some time past with a view to constructing a tunnel through the mountain at a lower level and so ensuring this outlet for Kashmir's trade remaining open the whole year through. From the point where the road starts to climb on the one side, until it reaches the bottom on the other, it covers about forty miles. A tunnel driven through the mountain between both places would be only seven miles long—a saving of some thirty-three miles. Between 1890 and 1900 Major-General de Bourbel suggested the construction of a tunnel under the pass between Takia and Womoo which he estimated would bore for four and a half miles; it would have been at a height of seven thousand feet. Then in 1900 J. Adams made a survey of the Pir Panjal range and he proposed a tunnel at an altitude of eight thousand feet which would be less than a mile and a half in length, and maintained that at such a height it would seldom for long be blocked with snow. There is little doubt that one will eventually have to be constructed, for those who are entrusted to rule must know full well that until such time prosperity will not be possible for the Valley of Kashmir.

As we neared the foot of the mountains and came towards

the wide valley, so the patches of cultivated land increased in number. On the way we had only seen the road coolies at work —always in pairs, for one holds the handle of the shovel and the other the length of rope which is tied down near to the spade, at it takes two men to move a shovel full of hard rock—and the few men of the valley who were trudging the long road home so that they might save a few extra rupees to give their families after working on the other side of the mountains for months. We had also met odd parties of three or four men and women with great trusses of grass on their heads; from where they were coming or where going we could not imagine.

At the foot of the mountains, as the road flattened out, so the surface became smooth; no longer was the hard grip necessary; it was now difficult to find a patch of ground which was not under cultivation, each tiny field being divided from its neighbour by loose stone walls. Then we came on the terraced rice fields, with a stream, which could be diverted to any of them by damming it with stones, bouncing and sparkling over the rock bed. A few black buffaloes were grazing by the roadside under the eye of a couple of boys, whose one thrill in life seemed to be had by placing a stick across the road so that cars might crush it.

Just before the village of Banihal, there is the toll post, after which come the houses, shops and the Dak bungalow, whilst here, when we filled up with petrol we found it cost a rupee a gallon less than in the Valley, such is the expense of the journey over the Pass.

From Banihal to Ramban, at a height of about five thousand feet, is a distance of twenty-three miles; there are few who do not consider this to be the most lovely stage of the route. For miles on end the road, which in this part is the original one, runs hundreds of feet above the river Chenab, but the valley is narrow, the grey rock on either side steep; the little valleys which come down to join that in which run river and road are thick with trees, as also are some of the more gentle slopes, but where they are not, the grey and blue shadings of the rocks add to the beauty of the glorious scene. In parts the giant rocks hang over the road, which on its other side is protected by a stone wall from the precipitous drop to the river. Occasionally a stream rushes down from above, in places it becomes a

waterfall; crystal clear, sometimes it runs in a gully beneath the road, in other places where the flow is only during the spring when the snows are melting, a culvert passes over the road to carry it away. In some places, the air is cooled by the water which drips down the rock side and feeds the masses of maidenhair ferns and flowering creepers of all colours, white, pink yellow and blue, and I began to wish I had studied the names of flowers as it seemed so mild to enter in my diary "white, pink, yellow and blue creepers".

At one place, where we could see the side valley coming down from above, strewn with tons of loose stones and rocks, a tunnel has been built through the rock at the bend of the road, so that as the great boulders fall, just as they have done for hundreds of years, the road is safe and clear. But in other parts, the loose, grey, slate-like shale had fallen, as it does there at all times of the year, and a gang of coolies complete with bulldozer were shifting it under the eye of an engineer who stood near the flagman and told us when we could move over to the other side, for they pride themselves on keeping that road open at all times in spite of these frequent landslides.

Just as we turned a blind corner, before which a sign post had warned us of a steep decline, we came on masses of goats and horses completely covering it. The horses were loaded with packs and long poles; there were women and children and great St. Bernard-like dogs mixed up with them, and as we got closer, the goats made either to climb wildly up the side of the mountain or jump down over the stone wall, the women holding frantically on to the bridles of the horses and shouting, until finally their men dashed up to help them. These people are Gujars, who speak in sonorous tones a dialect of Punjabi: nomads, they come each year into the Valley to feed their flocks and herds. Typically from the North-West Frontier, their faces are sallow, long and bony, their noses hooked, their eyes deep-set and dark brown, their hair black and greasy, and the clothes they wear remind one of the gipsy of Europe. Many of the women carried loads, the little girls had baby sisters on their backs, while the men and boys carried nothing but sticks with which to drive the animals. Even as they clung on to a prancing, dancing, frightened horse they laughed and salaamed us. Later

we came upon another band of them camped in a nullah near a stream on the wayside. Their tents were of rags stitched together and stretched on the wooden framework. They were cooking, the great iron pots standing over the fires which the little long-skirted child girls were feeding with the sticks they ran round to gather. The men were in a bunch round a pipe some distance off; the boys were tormenting a goat; they all looked filthy, their skins greasy, their clothes begrimed, yet some rather pretty girls of the party were even then washing something by the river, maybe it was goat hair they would sell raw or make up into something to be bartered in a shop for some commodity they needed on the way: from the milk of their herds they make ghee. They are ignorant, simple people.

From Ramban to Batote is eighteen miles, and the road goes down to two thousand two hundred feet above sea level. It twists and turns, and during the run passes over a long suspension bridge which crosses between two great high mountain walls of red rock, the river rushing a hundred feet below, glistening and clear, and carrying down with it hundreds of great logs which have been cut higher up, marked so that the owners are known, and sent down by this cheap form of transport, the only expense being the pay of the men who are posted at those parts of the river which are known to choke up. Further along the road we came on parked lorries; these were at places where the flow of the river slowed and the logs became beached on the sandbanks. It was here that they were being lifted up and carried by coolies to the road transport, to continue their journey to the Punjab.

Looking across at the tree-covered slopes on the other side we could pick out an old unused road, and this we did many times later on, maybe it was the original road up to the pass and made in the days before suspension bridges could be built to span the torrent; so that those who then travelled had to wait until they came upon a place where the waters were quiet enough for a ferry or shallow enough to ford.

Batote is four thousand five hundred feet high, and from that village to Kud is a distance of twelve miles, during which the road goes over the Patnu Pass; it is one long, climbing series of twists. The beauties were such that I found it almost impos-

sible to keep my eyes on the road and away from the magnificent views as we climbed up through blue and grey cedars, tall firs and straight pines, the ground strewn with their cones and needles, the scent in the air glorious. As though to tempt the tourist to stop a while to enjoy to the full all that is about him, on many of the bends the road has been widened so that a car can be parked, for it is the ideal place for the picnic lunch or tea as you look down on the forest-covered hills, the silver river lost for a distance behind their beautiful multicoloured branches and high in the background the snow-covered mountain tops, sharply separated by their whiteness from the clear blue of the sky.

The rest house at Kud sits just above the road, and although the furnishings were far from up to hotel standard, food of a kind was to be had there, and so we stopped the night, to awaken next morning to walk out on to the covered verandah and look across to the distant hills, over the mist which still clung to the valley between. Like most of these rest houses and Dak bungalows, which are usually quite old buildings, it has been beautifully sited for tourists but is not comfortable enough to encourage them to linger long. This was to be the last night on which blankets would be required on the bed.

From here down to Udhampur is a distance of twenty-five miles, the road gradually dropping, with many hairpin bends; but still the country clings to its trees, although as the latitude becomes lower, so the sweet-smelling pines and the firs are replaced by others. From among the barren red rocks great bushes grow, and when we were there they were all in bloom, the most fascinating being a mass of pink wax-like flowers, the leaves narrow, long and glossy, and when we stopped we found small clumps of wild strawberries in those parts of the road which held more vegetation. Still the road was with the river.

Most of the little towns we had passed through had consisted of long bazaars, always with many "hotels" which are really restaurants. Here and there on the bend of the road, beneath shady trees and close to a stream or a spring there were the odd tea shops, their sign of trade as always, being rows of cups and saucers and tiny tea pots, for each customer has his own pot; whilst behind them is a great clay stove with a kettle always

boiling on the top, and usually there are tin biscuit boxes with glass fronts to display the different kinds of cakes. There were always the cloth shops, the shelves sparsely spread, but with the dhursie—or tailor, usually a Sikh—sitting cross-legged on the verandah before his sewing machine, it being quite usual for the purchaser of cloth who comes from some way off in the hills to buy a length and wait for it to be made up into whatever article he or she wants. Then there was always the dry-goods store, most of that which the shopkeeper had to sell being displayed in large, flat baskets, whether it be tea, soap, tobacco, chilli powder, salt, flower, rice or any other commodity; always he had for sale lengths of rope, small fans for brightening up the charcoal cooking fire, and sweepers' brooms, besides oil for lamps and the ghee for cooking. His was a shop essential to every hamlet.

From Udhampur to Jammu is a little over forty miles. By now I began to realize that the lovely Valley of Kashmir was a long way off, for low hills surround the road; these are bleak and as we went further, so the trees and bushes no longer grew. The road winds, with many blind corners, and the rocks change in their colour to an elephant grey; they are smooth, as though soft, and there are signs in plenty of erosion, but the road is wide and the surface good. With little else to think about, my mind went back to that which I had read of this road. In the not very distant past, the route to Srinagar was the private road of the Maharaja; over this he travelled each spring to go to his summer capital, and returned the same way to Jammu, his winter capital, in the late autumn. All but the last Maharaja, who used cars, took weeks to make the journey; each night camp was made, usually at one of the rest houses but not necessarily so, though always near to a spring—a few of those he used are still adorned with the stone carved heads of animals out of the mouths of which cool water was made to flow for His Highness. He did not always move on next morning though; the decision as to when he could continue the journey being arrived at by his pundits, and if they decided that the stars were not propitious, then the Maharaja just stayed put, sometimes for weeks on end, whilst "his Srinagar subjects anxiously awaited His Highness's arrival".